

Sierra009 Archives

by Mandalore Requiem

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Summary: Unearthed 200,000 years past his expiration date. Sierra-009 finds himself thrust into a Universe full of conflicting ideals.

Where he is forced to take up a new role 009 fights to restore order and justice among the stars as a the leader of one of the most feared race in history - The Mandalorians. NOTE: Sort of evolved into an Å¼ber crossover of Science Fiction.

1. Timeline

:/Commonwealth Extragalactic Extranet/:

>:Historical Archives Search= Timeline of Mandalore the Innovator's Life/:

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:/Life and Service History of Mandalore the Innovator/:

-c.2511: SPARTAN II 009 is born on the colony Tribute in the Epsilon Eridani System.

-c.2515: Sierra-009's Parents are killed in an Insurrectionists bombing with no known living relatives he is orphaned at the age of Four years old.

-c.2517: Sierra-009 along with the seventy-six other children are chosen to be candidates for the SPARTAN II program. All seventy-five candidates are around the age six and from both sexes, and have near

perfect psychological and genetic markers. They are kidnapped and replaced with flash clones for the program.

-c.2518: SPARTAN II Jai-006, Jerome-092, John-117, Kurt-051, and Sierra-009 are recorded to be having higher performance rates than their peers. ONI's Section Zero is considering one for special operations well beyond the skill set of natural ONISAD Assets.

>-Dr. Halsey and Senior Chief Petty Officer Franklin Mendez begin to take note of signs indicating a prolonged grief disorder in Sierra-009 due to his antisocial tendencies with his fellow SPARTANS.<p>

-c.2519: Senior Chief Petty Officer Franklin Mendez assigns Sierra-009 to work with Daisy-023 Fhadjad-084, Cal-141.

>-John-117 earns the status of Squad Leader.
-During sparring with Li-008, Sierra-009 dislocates Li's right arm to win. 009 was later disciplined for excessive force.

-c.2520: Sierra-009 shields Daisy-023 from accidental friendly fire from a negligent handler during a live fire exercise. Sierra-009 is hospitalized for three months, during that time he develops a stronger relationship with his fellow SPARTANS. Primarily Daisy-023, Fhadjad-084, and Cal-141.

>-Sierra-009 and Daisy-023 begin to exhibit signs of excessive fraternization between the two. Earning some suspicion and near constant observation from the SPARTAN II Programs personnel<p>

-c.2522: Sierra-009 kills an intoxicated guard for attempting electrocute Cal-141 to death with a cattle prod. 009 was later disciplined for using excessive force. When asked why he killed the guard he responded by saying he was drinking on the job.

>-Later interviews for Sierra-009 with Dr. Halsey reveals that he doesn't believe in hitting women. Because his parents raised him to be a gentleman and that 009 made a promise to his mother that he would never hit a girl. Halsey later retracted her original theory that the II was inherently violent.
-009 was later labeled as over protective of his fellow IIs especially the female trainees and extreme caution was to be warranted when disciplining them when Sierra-009 is present.

-c.2525: the SPARTAN II augmentation procedures begins. Only 46 of the original 76 candidates survive.

>-The Great War or the Human-Covenant War begins on February 11. The war was instigated by the Covenant whose Prophets learn that humanity was the rightful inheritors of everything the Forerunners left behind. To ensure the Covenant stayed intact with the Prophets at its head humanity was to be exterminated to cover up the truth about reclamation.
-November 27th Mark IV MJOLNIR Powered Assault Armor is put into service by the SPARTAN IIs.

>-January 3rd on the outer colony Biko Sierra-009 suffered intense Retina and Lens plasma scarring on both eyes from a Sangheili energy sword blinding him. In the weeks that followed 009 receives a multiple cybernetic implants and retina augmentations to restore and improve his eyesight.<p>

-c.2526: Sierra-009 was assigned to Section Zero of ONI, giving him free range to do whatever is necessary to combat the Covenant and gave the Lone-wolf the rank of a Lieutenant Commander.

>-Using an abandoned observation station as bait 009 infiltrates the a Covenant Supercarrier and raids their database with the help of his "dumb" AI designated Prometheus. He later escapes in a Seraph Starfighter before a time release explosive caused the reactor to overloaded destroying the carrier in the process.<p>

-c.2527-2531: Sierra-009 was orders to preserve ONI's interests during the Harvest Campaign till it came to it's end in 2531.

>-During that time he was responsible for the deaths of multiple Covenant Higher-ups, and had a close call with Thel'Vadam during one such raid on the flagship Seeker of Truth.
-During the four years in Epsilon Indi System Sierra-009 had reportedly performed over sixty combat operations most with the requested help of Daisy-023 and Cal-141.

-c.2529 Daisy-023 was reported Killed In Action during the escort of troops that had been caught behind enemy lines to an evac zone.

>-Devastated by the lose Sierra-009 decide the only fitting way to pay his respects to his closest friend was to lead an demolitions operation, composed of members of SPARTAN II teams Red and Black and a contingent of ODST Recon Specialists. The objective was simple infiltrate as many Covenant vessel in the fleet over Harvest as possible, and deploy a multiple of Variant V HAVOK Tactical Nukes. The results was a devastated blow to the Covenant fleet "The Truly Mindful."<p>

-c.2530: SPARTAN-B312 is born on board the UNSC Pillar of Autumn as it retreats to Arcadia with civilians and wounded.

-c.2531: The SPARTAN-III program is initiated by Colonel James Ackerson, and placed under the supervision of SPARTAN II Lieutenant Commander Kurt-051 on Onyx in the Zeta Doradus System.

-c.2536: After a number of covert operations under Section Zero SAD Sierra-009 begins receiving the nick name "Reaper" from his fellow SPARTANS. Sierra-117 was once recorded to have made a sarcastic remark to an unidentified ODST, "It's comforting to know that Death has got our six when jumping into hell."

-c.2545: Beta Company SPARTAN III 312 is placed under Sierra-009's command as an understudy in becoming an equally talented lone-wolf assassin. Both receive a prototype Mark V MJOLNIR Armors to handle more "complicated" operations.

-c.2552: Now a Captain with Naval Intelligence's Section Zero Sierra-009 is commissioned to test out the advanced MJOLNIR Powered Assault Armor/Black prototype before Black Team receives models of their own to further test.

>-After holding the lines as long, as possible on Reach. 009 was sent to Earth to regroup and prepare for the coming Covenant incursion. His understudy B312 is killed in action before he could rescued her during the glassing of Reach.
-Mean While Sierra-117 was successful with the Smart A.I. Cortana in destroying Forerunner Installation 04.

>-October 20th_the battle for Earth Begins. Sensing Sierra-009 desire for vengeance Section Zero ONISAD Director ***** assigns the SPARTAN Captain of the UNSC Prowler "Look Over Your Shoulder" to oversee the assassination of High Prophet of Regret by whatever means

necessary.
-November 2nd_Sierra-009 is successful in assassinating Regret with renovated M99 Stanchion Gauss Rifle while John-117 dealing with the Honor Guard was used as a distraction.
>-November 3rd_Sierra-009 Participates in the Great Schism assisting the Separatist Leader Thel'Vadam the new Arbiter to prevent the activation of Installation 05. During this time Sierra-117 is successful in the assassination of the High Prophet of Mercy as he and Truth attempt to escape a now flood overrun High Charity. The Master Chief stowaways on the Forerunner dreadnought to assassinate Truth.
-The First UNSC/Separatist "Smart" AI dubbed Leonardo is created from a flash clone of the mind of a Huragok bonded with New Mombasa Superintendent AI registered as Virgil. Leonardo's lifespan might far exceed that any AI to date.
>- During a raid on the facility holding Leonardo by Covenant Loyalist Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood places Leonardo into Captain 009's protective custody and care.
-Later that year came the Battle for Installation 00 begins. The Arbiter and Master Chief were assigned to the elimination of High Prophet of Truth. While Sierra-009 was assigned to a different task. With a squad of SPARTAN III Alpha, Beta, and Gamma Company survivors they were placed in charge of data recovery from the Arks Library and raiding the Loyalist battle net for tactical intel to be used against the Loyalists in the years to come.
>-The Arbiter ends up killing Truth with the Master Chief. After the destruction of Installation 00 the Arbiter, 009 and his team are the soul remaining survivors to escape the premature activation of the newly rebuilt Installation 04.<p>

-c.2553: On March 3, The UNSC Hillside Memorial is erected as a tribute to the soldiers of the United Nations Space Command who gave their lives during the 27 years of the Great War.
>-Among the names and photos were Captain Jacob Keyes, Lieutenant Commander Miranda Keyes, Sergeant Major Avery Junior Johnson, and the numbers 117 in honor of the Master Chief.<p>

-c.2554: SPARTAN-009 is given the recently finished MJOLNIR GEN2 Mark VII Prototype (Envision the Mark VI except with a black visor to go with an all black color scheme), to combat the Loyalists, and any remaining Insurrectionist threat.
>-Sierra-009 continued to lead joint-operations against the remaining Loyalist in the Great Schism until c.2557 when they Loyalist surrendered and disbanded after Operation: PRAZIQUEANTEL.
-Operation: PRAZIQUEANTEL: was a ONISAD covert OP where a multiple of Nova Bombs were deployed on the San'Shyuum's new home-world and their colonies to demoralize the Loyalists and force them into surrender.

-c.2558: With no Wars left to fight Sierra-009 the last of the known living SPARTAN II at the time requests to be place in cryogenic stasis till humanity needs him again. Lord Hood agrees and places Leonardo in charge of maintaining SPARTAN II Captain Sierra-009 life support while in the Cryostasis.

-102 ABY Galactic Time = c.202,684 UNSC Time: For millennial Sierra-009 slept on Earth in the remains of a ONI Facility untouched and forgotten by Humanity and History. Leonardo eventually dissipated into rampancy by the year c.5728 breaking the record of the longest living Celestial (Reclaimer) AI at the time by three years. If it were not for the "Perfect" AI he created named Sentinel-1452-Vinci to take his place the Cryo Tube would have failed millennia ago.

>-August 5th_on the volcanic plains of the planet Tracyn (formerly known as Earth and Erde-Tyrene) in the Mandalore system a faint distress signal is detected by a Mandalorian repurposed Clone War Venator-class Star Destroyer renamed the "Beten-Sol'yc" (To Sigh First).
-August 17th_after much excavation with the support from Mandalore the Pragmatic Chernan Ordo and her resources they finally penetrated the near perfectly preserved remains of a Section Zero Office of Naval Intelligence fallout bunker five miles beneath the planets surface. Thanks to the three dozen Plasma/Hydrogen reactor hybrids powering the facility the jewel from an era once lost to humanity was ensured a chance at survival.

>-August 18th_Mandalorian scientists discover that the facility was composed of a multiple levels that descend another mile or so deep within the planet's crust. They were unaware that they had discovered one of the most important latchkeys to humanities forgotten history and origins.
-Later in the day after repelling down an elevator shaft four levels down they discover what appeared to be the medical facility. It was at this time Sentinel-1452-Vinci decided to reveal herself emerging from her holo-tank appearing in the form of teenaged girl wearing armor reminiscent of ancient rome. The AI revealed she had been waiting for them for sometime by making the sarcastic remark of, "what took you so long." After introductions to the team and the current Mandalore Sentinel began the reanimation process of 009 from his slumber. For the first time since he first went into cryo over 200,000 years ago he was being woken up by an adrenaline cocktail being shot in veins.

-103 ABY: Mandalorian scientist inform 009 he has Hypocryo-Metabolic Syndrome from the prolonged exposure to being in cryostasis. As a result his biological clock to a near halt. Scientists begin attempting to discover a cure to reseting his clock at his request.

-107 ABY: Having embraced the Mandalorian society and made it his own Sierra-009 quickly shot up through the ranks to being the Mandalore's right hand man.

>-During this period he was able to persuade Pragmatic to begin making moves to expand Mandalores power and spheres of influence. To be ready for the Empire's eventual attack he first begins with reorganization of the Mandalorian Military.
-Founding new military tiers and Special Forces branches. Such as United Provinces of Mandalore Special Operations Command (UPM-SOC or UPM-SOCOM) for tier 2 operations. For example.

>_UMP-Navy: Tra Galaar Ramikad Traat'aliite (Space Hawk Commando Teams) TGR Troopers or Raptors
_UMP-Colonial Guard: Me'suum Aran Ramikad Traat'aliite (Planet Guard Commando Teams) aka MAR Troopers

>_UMP-Marines: Akalenedat Ramikad Traat'aliite (Hard Contact Commando Teams) aka AR Troopers, or Helljumpers
-Later that year he establishes MIN (Mandalorian Intelligence Networks) and places it under the authority of the Mandalore as a Tier 3-1 initiative.

>-Near the end of the year he begins pushing for a new SPARTAN V Program with the information saved in Sentinel's matrix.
-Though the training and the method of collecting the candidates was changed to make the program a lot less unethical it was still a life commitment for the candidates.

>-Starting with the same ages of five through seven they began sending recruiters to families with an offer to the children and

their parents. Since Sierra-009 still held a grudge against ONI for kidnapping him from the orphanage in the middle of the night all those Millennia ago he made sure that the candidates and the parents were well aware of the process before signing on.
-Instead of a boot-camp 009 suggested creating an academy where for the next twelve years where they would educate and train the SPARTAN V's.
-During their eighth year they would go through the Augmentation Procedures.
-Parents would be allowed frequent visits and during every monthly candidates would be offered leave to go home to visit family for a few days.
- The candidates and their family receive government financial support and tax exemptions<p>

-108 ABY: The Mandalorian Government made a public announcement about the SPARTAN V program after the first class's enrollment. More critically classified intelligence was kept under lock and key for the United Provinces of Mandalore security.
-During the late Fall Sierra-009 begins using his military background to start designing weapons and armor. He later founds Mandalorian Armor Rifles & Synthetics Industries (MARS Industries).
-MARS Industries begins producing high quality armaments for the Mandalorian public and military.
-While simultaneously the II scours Forerunner Ark Archives provided by Sentinel for solutions towards the growing population and food crisis.<p>

-109 ABY: A terraforming process based off of Forerunner technology is paid in full for the primary and secondary planets that can become habitable in the Mandalore sector.
-Forerunner Replicator technology is discovered on the remains of Ghibalb.<p>

-110 ABY: Mandalore the Pragmatic is assassinated by a terrorist group of extremists known as the Kyr'tsad (Death Watch) during her yearly Mandalorian Conditions Address. Meanwhile Sierra-009 was on a political mission to relocate what remains of the Sangheili Imperium.

>-He would soon discover that after 200 thousand years of isolation they were prospering along with two other former Covenant species the Unggoy and the Jiralhanae.
-A month after the Pragmatic's funeral the Clan leaders begin deliberating on the next Mandalore. While 009 invites the former covenant races to Mandalore to negotiate a more permanent alliance.
- During which Sith Assassins attempt to kill the representatives before they reach Mandalorian space. But are intercepted by the SPARTAN II and Arbiter Zuka'Vadum's grandson Thel'Vadum.
-After failing to assassinate the representatives the Sith kidnap Sika Thel's younger sister to use her as a bargaining chip against the Arbiter. 009 rescues Sika from the assassins who would blackmail the Arbiter into not developing stronger relations with the UMP. Out of gratitude and honor Thel swears a life debt to 009 for saving his younger sister's life.
-Three days later the United Provinces of Mandalore forms an alliance with the Sangheili Imperium, Unggoy Confederacy, and The United Tribes of Doisac under the new banner of the Commonwealth.
-A week later on November 21 Sierra-009 is named Mandalore The Innovator by the Mandalorian Council.

-111 ABY: Mandalore the Innovator begins pushing for new Legal and Education reforms like the Honorable Service Act. Stating that any

Freelance activity that was in any form of violation of Mandalorian Law in and out of Mandalorian space was here by illegal. The Mandalorian Military Ba'jur (education) Act. That required Mandalorian schools to have military training programs to compliment their current universal studies.

>-Keeping up with the old Mando philosophy of quality over quantity MandalMotors and MARS Industries begin co-designing a new starfighter model to replace the old Bes'uliik. They eventual develop the Werdakad.
- Later that year MARS Industries signs a military contract to develop new Armors variants for the various military branches of the Commonwealth.

-112 ABY: Mandalore the Innovator integrates Forerunner Warships into the Commonwealth military after four successful visits to various Forerunner Shield World Installations like Onyx.

>-Resent military advances begin to attract the Fel Empire's attention which soon lead to the demands for Commonwealth disarmament and merging with the Empire immediately.
-After an unanimous vote from the current Commonwealth Council they denied the Empires demands.

-113 ABY: The Empire declares war on the Commonwealth, marking the beginning of the Independence War.

>-The Commonwealth denies Galactic Alliance offer of assistance stating that when the time came for negotiations they will need a mediator.
_[Codex/Technology Entry_Matter-Replicator-Magazine (MRM or MR-Clip): Many technological marvels have been yielded since the recovering of the Forerunner Archives hidden away on a desolate Ghibalb. One such technology was matter replication with a variety of applications such as creating foodstuffs, clothing, medicine, rare ores, and machine parts. It was not until the Independence War that Mandalore the Innovator came up with a new purpose for the technology when compact-channel linear accelerator technology proved to be highly effective against Imperial forces despite the only proven drawback being the limited amount ammunition a soldier could bring with them on a battlefield.

Thus the Matter-Replicator-Magazine or MR-Clip was born. Through a combination of Celestial (Post-Reclaimer) micro-arc reactor technology and Forerunner replicators. An extended magazine that could hold up to thirty 12.7x99mm Armor-Piercing rounds for a DMR could now hold up to thousand rounds per magazine or more depending on battery life. Thus eliminating the need for frequent supply drops during the Independence War.

MARS Industries is currently exploring new ways to make the MRM more EMP resistant.]

>-Nine month later after a multiple of crushing loses the Empire requests a ceasefire and the Commonwealth opens the doors to peace talks. Outer rim systems that wished to leave the Empire were allowed to either become independent systems or join either the Commonwealth or Galactic Alliance most chose the earlier of the two powers.<p>

-115 ABY: the SPARTAN V class of 119 goes through their augmentation process no fatalities are reported. Later they receive their first powered assault armor the MJOLNIR GEN4 Mark IX.

-117 ABY: The Mandalore's prototype flag ship, "The Spirit of Fire" is sent on its maiden-voyage to explore a not too distance galaxy.

Named after the repurposed colony ship lost during the Great War. The Spirit of Fire was the latest combination in modern Mandalorian, Celestial, and Forerunner technology. Utilizing a dual Hyper/Slipspace Drive system that first opened a rip into slipspace then another into hyperspace allowing for speeds of travel well beyond any recorded Starship.

>-A week later the Spirit of Fire makes first contact with a galactic government referred to as the Citadel their current Galactic year is 2,163. Peace talks and the possibilities of trade agreements eventually leading to the Commonwealth gaining an Embassy on the Presidium.<p>

-118 ABY: Mandalore Innovator attend the funeral of Arbiter Zuka'Vadum who past away at the late age of 697. Later after the memorial Imperial Admiral Thel'Vadum is chosen by the Kaidon Collective to be the next Arbiter of Sanghelios.

>-A few months later on the Presidium Mandalore the Innovator and the newly dubbed Arbiter of Sanghelios are seen working on identifying a location to construct a Commonwealth enclave that would connect all the levels of the wards with the presidium. Hoping it would help integrate Commonwealth societies with Citadel's.
-During the search for real estate both representative witnessed a young Quarian Male being falsely accused of pick pocketing a man's jacket while the real criminal was getting away. The Mandalore attempts to reason with the C-Sec Officer that the young Quarian was innocent while the Arbiter chased down the true thief a young Asari Eclipse merc. Afterwards when the real pickpocket was arrested the C-Sec Officer attempted to arrest the Quarian for vagrancy but was meet with hash resistance from the two representatives. The Quarian was later identified as Kar'Danna vas Rayya who was on his pilgrimage. They are later informed that discrimination against the Quarian people is common.

>-Later that day the Commonwealth representatives demand answers from the Council about the mistreatment of the Quarrians. Only to be stonewalled with the ignorant belief that the discrimination against the Quarrians is a necessary penance given their "crime" of the creation of a synthetic race known as the Geth.<p>

-119 ABY: Despite clear disapproval from the Citadel Council the Commonwealth offers the Quarian Migrant Fleet a place in Commonwealth.

>-Later that year plans are made to find a planet with a similar environment to their once lost homeworld of Rannoch. So it can be then terraformed to meet the exact biological specifications necessary for the Quarian people. While MARS Industries Synthetics division is contracted in solving the issue of their weakened immune systems.
-The first Class of Spartan V's graduate on July 1. All 700 graduates are assigned with their traat'aliite (teams) to newly established Tier 1 military and intelligence branches. For example.

>_UMP-Navy: SPARTAN Kebiin (Blue) Traat'aliite (Teams) aka BTs
_UMP-Colonial Guard: SPARTAN Ge'tal (Red) Traat'aliite (Teams) aka GTs

>_UMP-Marines: SPARTAN Vorpan (Green) Traat'aliite (Teams) aka VTs
_Mandalorian Intelligence Network Section FIVE (MIN5): SPARTAN Ne'tra (Black) Traat'aliite (Teams) aka NTs

>-A month later the Military Council was founded placing the Highest ranked Military Leaders of the races that contribute the most to the Commonwealths combined military as the undisputed commanders. The Mandalore the Innovator, the Arbiter of Sanghelios, and the Chieftain

of the Jiralhanae are the current founding members.<p>

-120 ABY: the Commonwealth gives the Migrant Fleet three newly renovated Forerunner Cruisers and enough Hyper/Shaw-Fujikawa Drive cores for every ship in the fleet.

>-Later that year rumors begin to surface of a possible Black Ops organizations higher up food chain than the already vague Tier 1. This claim was later dismissed by all three the Members of the Military Council in a joint press meeting.<p>

-121ABY: Feeling the need for a more thoroughly trained Marine after a rise in Death Watch and pirate attacks. The Migrant Fleet begins looking into solutions to quell the problem.

>-Later that year the migrant fleet hired several Mandalorian Tier 1 and 2 specialists to help develop a more thoroughly effective training regime for the development of their own special forces branch
-September 23 the first ARM (Assault Recon Marine) Team was deployed against Batarian pirates. There were no casualties reported. Later that year the program is recorded as success.

-123 ABY: Civilian reports begin to filter in about an unknown paramilitary group taking direct action against terrorist and criminal organizations such as Death Watch and Cerberus. Civilian visual accounts report seeing Jiralhanae, Sangheili, and possibly human or Quarian soldiers countering these organizations.

-124 ABY: The Commonwealth District is finished after an up hill battle with the council about its construction. They were unfortunately forced to be build on top of Chora's Den a gentlemen's club.

>-More reports come in of the unknown multiracial paramilitary group operating in Commonwealth, Alliance, Imperial, Citadel, and Terminus space.<p>

-127 ABY: Some head way is made with speeding up Mandalore Innovators biological clock to a natural pace. He now ages biologically one year after every twenty.

>-Sithâ€"Imperial War ignites between the Fel Empire and the Galactic Federation of Free Alliances. Bitter with the Commonwealth the Alliance tells them to stay out of it.
-An unspecified number of critical Imperial military installations are reported destroyed by an unknown military entity not of the Alliance slips into the ears of the extragalactic public. Feeding popular growing civilian opinion of this entity might be the same multiracial paramilitary group that started popping up in the news rails about four years prior.

>-The Commonwealth offers to shelter anyone who does not wish to be involve in the war or lost their homes in the conflict.<p>

-130 ABY: After loosing unprecedented amount of ground the Galactic Federation of Free Alliances resentfully requests the aid of the Commonwealth.

>-Acting immediately the Military Council reveals and deploys their most elite special operations branch Task Force 151 at the Battle of Coruscant. Consisting of the very best of the Mandalorian, Sangheili, Jiralhanae, and Quarian Special Forces. During their deployment the 151 bought civilians and Jedi much critical needed time to evacuate from Coruscant.
-First Fleet is deployed to Caamas to provide aid to the in shambles Alliance fleet. Taking up the brunt of the Empires attack the Commonwealths First Fleet covers the remains of the Alliance fleet's retreat. In doing so First Fleet demonstrates the

technological superiority of the Commonwealth compared to the unimaginably vast fleets of the Empire.

>-Later on MIN's Sections 3 decrypts an intercepted transmission from the Empire and discovers the Jedi fall back position of Ossus was compromised.
-SPARTAN Kebiin (Blue) Traat'aliite (Teams) Alpha 3 & 9, and Beta 7 arrive too late to prevent the majority of the massacre on Ossus. Sangheili Ascetics recovery teams escorted the remaining Jedi to the Sangheili cruiser "Eventual Justice" which retreated immediately to Commonwealth space where awaiting medical aid was on stand by for the surviving Jedi Order.

>-Reports later come in from the SPARTAN Kebiin (Blue) Traat'aliite (Teams) Alpha 3 & 9, and Beta 7 actual had in keeping to the Mandalore's orders eliminated the enter ground-side SithImperial task force sent to Ossus with one SPARTAN casualty reported. A member of Alpha 3 who broke his arm while tearing apart a Terror Walker with his bare hands after using up all his ordnance against the rest of its unit.

>-Afterwards Darth Krayt is reported starting a coup d'État against Emperor Fel.
-Moff Rulf Yage later reports to newly self-proclaimed Emperor Krayt that his entire ground regiment was wiped out by approximately a little more than two dozen or so super-soldiers the Commonwealth had been keeping in reserves all this time. One of which easily over powered Darth Nihl ripping his left arm clean off when the Fist attempted to get in close in an attempt to over power the Five in close quarters.

-131 ABY: The newly founded Sith-Empire asks for a cease fire agreement with the Commonwealth only after the majority of the Alliance remnant decides to flee to the Commonwealth space.

>-Following much deliberation the Commonwealth accepts seeing it as an opportunity to repair the damage cause by the Empire and to thoroughly reenforce their new border worlds.
-The Alliance Remnant and the Empire-in-exile continue their resistance against the Darth Krayt's Empire.

-132-137 ABY: The Sith-Empire and the Commonwealth have been in the middle of Cease Fire Agreement officially. Unofficially there is a Cold War going on between the two powers. But, many believe peace will not last for long.

-Today the Mandalore is currently in Citadel Space over seeing the Commonwealth district on the Presidium level while managing Mandalorian Space from a galaxy far way. Just above the shops and restaurants of the Commonwealth district.

2. Chapter 1

Chapter 1

"Mandalore you have an incoming call from Executor Pallin," the anonymous gaze of a reclining obelisk's doesn't leave the disassembled M8S, "Shall I patch him through?"

[Codex/Technology Entry MARS Industries Spec-Ops Railgun Line: All MARS electromagnetic projectile weapon technology uses the UNSC Asymmetric Recoilless Carbine-920's framework as the basis for their Railgun Line.

>{M8CSOCOM (M8S): the cute little sister of the old M6C/SOCOM. The

M8C/SOCOM has more bite in her than her predecessor. Carrying a twelve round load of 13.7x40mm Armor-Piercing rounds.}]]

The reclining Titan merely nods to the hologram of a young roman girl wearing the latest and greatest from fashion weekly after expelling what appears only to be a sigh before reassembling his pistol in record time. The image of a Turian male with the traditional facial markings of a colonial soon appears in the AI's placeâ€¦a furious looking one at that. 'I didn't know Turian's mandibles could bend that far?' thought the reclining figure to himself as words began to casually stream from the speakers of the archaic MJOLNIR GEN2 Mark VII, "Executor Pallin how may I be of assistance to C-Sec for today?"

"How about explaining how Red Sand and Hallex are flooding the streets of the Citadel," the old Turian roar as he pointed an accusing talon at the armored soldier still reclining in his seat, "Consider yourself lucky for now bucket-head if you didn't have diplomatic immunity I'd have you in a cell right now."

"You think I'm responsible for the recent narcotic rise on the Citadel?" their was a cue of amusement in the SPARTAN's voice. This was definitely a first in false accusations made by C-Sec, "and I suppose I'm responsible for the Eclipse's shipping tainted eezo too?"

"Yeahâ€¦yeahâ€¦act smug now but you and your lackeys will slip up eventually and I'll have all the evidence needed to have you and your whole race kicked off the Citadel," and with that the call was disconnected before the Mandalore could utter a word in defense. "Just thought you should know."

"Sentinel do meh a favor and rase Detective Chellick on a secure line."

"Right away Mandalore," with an over dramatic curtsey her emerald form disappeared from view and another Turian siting behind a desk appeared on the holo before him.

"Mandalore? Is this line secureâ€¦?" The SPARTAN nods, "good because talking to you can cost me my job. What do you want 009?"

"Your paranoid malignant narcissist of a boss thinks I'm smuggling and selling narcotics on the Citadelâ€¦. Any idea why?"

"Well he and a few others think your working with Fist," the Two leaned his head inquisitively signaling for more from Chellick.

"If I tell you this I want a bottle of Mandalorian Ale and Corellian Whisky since you seem so intent on getting me fired," Sierra merely nods for him to continue. "They think your using your diplomatic powers to help smuggle the narcotics in safely through your private ports while Fist then distributes the product on your district's upper levels. Since the activity is on Commonwealth soil it's outside of C-Sec's jurisdiction. That's why Pallin is trying to get the councils approval to have you removed from the Citadel."

The SPARTAN's grip on the arms of his chair tighten till the sound of bending metal became intolerable as the Shadow Broker Agents name resonated in his ears, "As you sure it's Fist?"

"As sure as my family Spirits watches over me."

"All right," the SPARTAN sighs as he slides a fresh clip into his M8S, "It seems Fist has over stayed his welcome in my basement. Be prepare to send a coroners team to Chora's Den."

"Well if your going to take the Law in your own hands again I suggest you watch your fire. A bounty hunter named Urdnot Wrex is going after him too. Careful with Wrex he is an experienced Battle Master."

"Thanks for the info. Sentinel make sure the good detective gets the highest quality product available on the market," rising from his seat to the hidden weapons locker to the right of the well furnished office before entering in forty-two digit code into key to retrieve custom Asymmetric Recoilless Carbine-985 with tactical scope. "Chellick one more question."

_ [Codex/Technology Entry_ MARS Industries Spec-Ops Railgun Line:

>{Asymmetric Recoilless Carbine-985 (ARC-985 or ARC): is a fully automatic remodel of the old UNSC Asymmetric Recoilless Carbine-920. The ARC is capable of carrying a thirty round MR-Clip of 16.75x112mm Armor-Piercing or High Explosive Incendiary Rounds - and is perfectly accurate up to 500 yards. The ARC is also the first successful EMP hardened rifle to date.}<p>

"Shoot." The cocking of a customized ARC registered in the Turian investigator's ears after witnessing an MR-Clip full of experimental High Explosive Incendiary Rounds being slapped into the rifle's well.

"Did your boss make false accusations against the Arbiter as well?" The II look back to the holo of a nervously fidgeting scratching the back of his head, "He knows he just sign his execution papers right?"

"â€¦." Chellick didn't say anything he knew this was bad. Executor Pallin probably just became the most wanted man in Sangheilian space because of that temper of his.

"Slandering me is one thingâ€¦." Charles sighed, "But a Sangheili of Such a Noble House let alone the Arbiter is a political nightmare. If word of this reaches the Kaidon Collective war might break out."

"Knowâ€¦is their any way to stop it?" the Detective shuddered at the thought of Palaven burning if word got out.

"You just focus on the Missis and the little one on the way and I'll deal with the Arbiter. No sense in worrying about things well outside your control, okay?"

"Your rightâ€¦good luck and thanks," Chellick muttered mostly to himself before ending the call.

"Sentinel tell Sika and Thel I'm going to have to reschedule lunch, and I need to speak to Thel before he demands the Executor's head."

"Already on it Charles."

"What would I do without you?" He was clearly smiling behind his black visor as he collected more than enough ammunition for his carbine and pistol.

"Maybe resort to using a wooden spear or bludgeon against your enemies," she joked with an innocent smile as he entered the private lift that would take him to the docks.

"Funny I'll keep that in mind when I'm deciding to continue our subscription to Balaho ExposÃ© Monthly," he teased the millennia old adolescent.

_[Codex/Species Entry_The Unggoy: Hailing from the methane rich frozen plains of Balaho the Unggoy a bipedal race of arthropods evolved to breath methane instead of oxygen like most sentient races. After the fall of the Covenant the Unggoy finally a free people experienced a cultural renaissance that still beats in their passionate hearts today. They began to explore and expand in various arts such as literature and architecture. Though fashion became the primarily essence of expression and individuality in their culture. The dull environmental suits of their time in shackles were replace by more striking and unique looks symbolizing their freedom.

Today the Unggoy are the leaders for the fashion industry in Commonwealth, and most of known space. Tirelessly exploring alien cultures and forgotten styles to feed their creative needs Unggoy works can be appreciated almost anywhere in known universe.]

Believing a possible victory against the AI Charles's mind uttered the words 'too easy.' As his peripheral vision soon took notice to the image of the overly animated Sentinel pouty face in the corner of his Heads Up Display, "Promise to be good girl, till I get back?"

The miniature avatar of Sentinel nodding her head in rapid succession following an excessively cute pair of animated eyes beginning water and wear away at his resolve. Charles cursed Mendez for never training him and his fellow SPARTANS to be immune to anything slightly cute before sighing in defeat, "All right, all right I was joking."

"You better be! I NEEDÂ€|to see those latest designs presented for this season by Buwan Couturiers. Dadyap is going to unveil his latest ideas and I want to be the first AI to download his work into my collect-" the ping of the elevator couldn't come at a better time another minute of Unggoy fashion and Charles's positronic brain might have ruptured.

"Senti I have to go we'll go over this another time. Play some Galaxy of Fantasy till I get back," cutting the transmission there Innovator started scanning containers in the loading docks of the Commonwealth's private factory district with his suit's sensors.

Noticing some factory workers he relocates his ARC to the magnetic weapon strips on his back while going down the manifest list in his

HUD (Heads Up Display) thoroughly.

Everything was checking out till he reached Fist's lot - a multiple of containers had just appeared overnight. Some of the manifests were so thoroughly forged only a trained operative from MIN could possibly tell the difference. "Fist is too stupid to have orchestrated this. Someone with shady qualifications must have been helping him with this," Charles muttered to himself in the privacy of his helmet. "Probably not the Shadow Broker. Not his usual MO. Besides he owes me for lending him MIN5 Theta 1 to recover his operatives from Zygerrian slavers he'd know better than to cross me."

"Hmm. This one was approved by a Turian named Saren Arterius. I know that name from somewhere," curious Charles began opening the crates while dismissing the protest of a few observing dock workers. "Red Sand, Hallex, even Minagen X3," the bitter aftertaste of regret for not kicking Fist out sooner all those years ago filled the Two's mouth. Turning to the group of workers and private security he spoke up with a resonating voice; "I'm evicting Fist permanently. I suggest that all of you begin looking for new jobs before I have you all convicted for dealing Narcotics on Commonwealth soil."

Some shrugged their shoulders and just left others left the Mandalore with a few choice words before running away when he drew his ARC-985 before hacking the back exits of Chora's Den, "Senti I need you to look up a profile name Saren Arterius. Senti? Sentinel I know you can hear me pause Galaxy of Fantasy long enough to run a quick search for meh."

"One second. I'm about to slay my third Shadow Spirit - then I'll have enough spirits to unlock the Armor of Amonkura," the AI had become engrossed with the game much to the SPARTAN's annoyance.

"Senti the game can wait."

"Fine," she was clearly rolling her eyes on the other end, "who's the mark again?"

"Saren Arterius," the blast door slid open and a wave of mass accelerator rounds began to barrage his armor. 009 instinctively took cover behind some crates as he checked his shield read out. Layer three was a quarter down and neither the secondary or the reserved layer had been breached. "Good. So they're just using black market junk. I'll just let my third and primary layers recharge first. Senti how's that search coming along."

"Forwarding Spectre's file on Saren Arterius now."

"Spectre? How many Citadel firewalls did you have to bypass to penetrate their classified mainframe?" Charles chuckled as he began a head count of his surroundings with his radar.

"Oh it was nothing," there was a tinkle of pride in her voice, as Charles delivered a series of head shots from his ARC to the hired guns. In an inhuman blur of motion he moved from cover to cover thinning their ranks. The new rounds tore through kinetic barriers like fine linen. A minute later one very petrified Salarian remained hidden behind the cover of a supply crate requesting reinforcements.

He sighs as he ricochets a thermal detonator into the Merc's hidey-hole and waited for the predictable yelp to come after the blast before checking the charge on his ARC's MR-Clip. His ammo indicator now read 94% charge. With a smile he thought about how the new Asymmetric Recoilless Carbine-985 and the High Explosive Incendiary Rounds were working far better than he initially hoped. The ARC was still a little large for standard infantry but for a Two like himself it was perfect.

Continuing his advance 009 stops in mid-step as his intuition forces him to disregard the all clear his radar was displaying. Wheeling around he scans his rear for movement before lowering his weapon, "Haar'chak (Damn it)! Thel! Do you want me to kill ya what are you doing here anyway?"

A massive Sangheili standing at eight feet and seven inches decloaked from the shadows in advance-ornamental, "Forgive me Brother but when Sentinel asked to postpone the lunch date with my sister and I."

The Arbiter paused as he drew his fore fathers swords from his silver and gold livery armor with a wrathful growl, "We inferred it was because of Executor Pallin's call and you were going off to deal with Fist first. So we decided to join you on this noble crusade for our honor."

"Thel I and only the truly blessed known of the Nobility of your Family's Poem. Why let the words of the Council's glorified doorman get to you." 009 sighed. He could tell Thel was on the warpath as he noticed the ghostly outline to his left, "Sika does this mean you finished your Rites to join the Zealots?"

"You always did know were to look milord," following suit Sika decloaked as well, revealing a newly donned burgundy armor of an Elite Zealot as she approached. "He is right my brother why should we mind the misgivings of a single Fool?"

"That may be so my siblings. But in souring my note he dares sour all of Sanghelios's Blessed Tempoâ€such a dishonorable act is unforgivable and demands retribution through HONOR."

"Fineâ€but we must keep this out of the publics eye. If the Collective gets word of this they'll demand a public execution or worse. Which will only hurt our political stance here in this galaxy ner vode (my siblings)."

"Agreed. I will retrieve the Fool in the dead of night and bring him to your feet to grovel for forgiveness my brother," Sika cut in before her Brother began to plan a full out assault on C-Sec headquarters with nothing less than a battalion a his back. Charles chuckled at her boldness as her elder Sangheili looked at her with a mix of amused-annoyance before nodding in agreement. The little girl Sierra-009 had save all those years ago was now a young women by her people's standards. Sika now stood eye to eye with the Two at seven feet and five inches.

"Looks like I'm almost taller than you now Charles," she toyed before giving her childhood protector the customary hug.

"Well actual your taller now. My armor adds on about three inches," he knew this day would come eventually. The emerald eyes of the Vadum

siblings widening to the sound of venting atmosphere from the release of the Mark VII's airlocks following removal of his helmet, "Well a promise is a promise."

"You remembered. Even after 27 years," she was clearly touched by the sentiment. For the very first time in their lives the siblings were looking upon the SPARTAN'S helmetless face. >009' skin still held some color but it was still relatively pale by human standards. His hair held visible hints of grey mixed in with the younger dark brown that was maintained short, practical and perfectly within the UNSC regulation except for the five o'clock shadow that did little to hide a collection of scars on his visage. The most noticeable traveled horizontally from eye to eye in an impossible white hue.<p>

"I keep my promises Sika," Charles spoke again taking notice of how much she had matured over the years. Poor Thel must have been going through hell from just keeping the suiters away.

"Intriguingâ€|. I always thought that the glow that breached your visor were internal lights of some sort. So he really did take your eyes," was the Arbiter's response as he recalled the lines in their family's Battle Poem where their ancestor Rtas'Vadum made his entry. "You were the one who took Rtas's mandibles."

Charles merely nodded. Sika seem to be swept up in his eyes before speaking, with curiosity, "Were they always golden?"

"They were once blue. All the surgeries to recover my sight changed the pigment color. The glow of cybernetics is what you see behind my visor," Charles gave them the first visible smile they had seen all their lives before returning his helmet back to his head. "Come on we can talk about appearances later. I'll take lead while you two watch my six."

The 'Vadum siblings nodded as they formed up on the door to breach it. Charles pulled out a breach charge and places it on the door before moving into position. "Charge is primed in three," his fingers begin counting down, "two-."

The boom that rattled the back entrance to Chora's Den momentarily froze the combatants already attempting to secure the gentlemen's club front. The Commonwealth trio in the rear were now going room to room breaching and clearing the backrooms of Chora's Den till all that remained was a makeshift barricaded at the end of a hallway filled with hired guns. Sika effortlessly tosses a plasma grenade into the last line of defense as the others picked off the few that tried to escape the blast.

Reaching the door Charles signaled them to hold and reengage their cloaks before following him into Fist's office. Unsealing the door the Mandalore strolled in to face a terrified and dumbfounded crime lord, "Fist we need to talk."

In his peripheral vision he watched the cloaked sibling move into position at Fist's flanks. "M-mandalore w-what can I-I do for y-yoouu?" He stuttered in sync with the droplets of sweat running down his face. Whatever courageous thoughts of reaching for the heavy pistol resting on his desk were soon abandoned to the wrath of Thel's blade dismembering the crime lord's arm.

Charles approached the sniveling newly converted lefty cradling the seared nub of his right arm before grabbing him by the neck and slammed Fist up against the wall with barely enough force to kill him.

"I want answers Fist." Dangling a few feet in the air they were now eye to eye Fist shuddered under the last SPARTAN II's gaze. "Why are you working with Arterius and what would a Council Spectre have to gain from a growing drug epidemic on the Citadel?"

"He'll kill me!" Fist yelped in pain with the 009's encroaching grip.

"And I'll make you suffer if you don't," Charles deadpanned. Sika felt a stir of disbelief as she watched her childhood savior make such a cold ultimatum. The warmth she grew up with had been replaced the feared ONISAD Operator known only as Reaper. Then on the other hand was used to this side of 009 from the years of serving with the SPARTAN II turned Mandalorian he learned there were two faces to this strange human one cordial the other detached and objective.

The swish of the club door opening interrupted Fist's train of thought as the Sangheili duo turned to meet the new threat. "Let him go! If anyone is going to kill Fist it's going to be me!" the voice of a male Krogan growled.

"Urdnot Wrex?" Charles asked keeping Fist pinned while looking back.

"Who wants to know?" There was control, dominance, and a rare calm Charles discerned in the Battlemaster's voice before noting with scars running down the left side of Wrex's face and the crimson crest that matched his eyes. The SPARTAN then scanned the two trailing the Hunter. There was an attractive dark skinned woman with bright blue eyes and short cut blond hair wearing a standard issued Alliance N7 armor. The faded scar running down from the left side of her face did little to subtract from her apparent beauty. Bringing up the rear was oddly enough Garrus Vakarian a shoot first ask questions later C-sec Investigator 009 only knew by reputation thanks to Chellick.

'Interesting,' was the first thought that crossed the Spook's mind as he took in the situation. "That doesn't matter. What does is that I'll pay you triple whatever the Shadow broker is paying you if you turn around and leave."

"I'm sorry but I can't allow that. We need what he knows about the Quarian," the N7 interrupts without breaking eye contact.

"Fine," Charles tightens his grip staring Fist down again. "Fist. I want a clear answer or we're going to remove another limb." Tossing him over the desk to the feet of the visitors Charles casually walked over to the whimpering criminal getting up, "But, first I want you to answer my question about Arterius."

Garrus's mandibles fluttered in surprise while the N7 eye's widened a bit at the mention of the Spectre. Clearly this was a popular subject.

"Iâ€|caâ€|" Sika began to walk over with her blade at ready to remove something else Fist immediately panics, "Okayâ€|! Okayâ€|! Saren said he wanted to use the drugs as a means to booting the Commonwealth out of Citadel space. Make it look like you guy's were violating the trade treaties."

"What could he gain from that?" The N7 took the words out of Charles's mouth as they all were staring Fist down to keep up the pressure.

"I don't know," Fist shrugs ignorantly before finding himself squirming to get free of Sierra-009's titanium grip while dangling in mid air yet again. "I swear! Gawhâ€|I know only what he tells meâ€|." The crime lord was gasping for breath with every word.

His suit synaptic impulse sensors weren't picking up any signs of deception so Charles lowered Fist slowly. "What about the Quarian? What have you done with her?" Garrus spoke in an unreadable tone.

"Her? She said she had valuable information to trade for protection, said she would only trade it with the Shadow Broker directly,"

Wrex chuckled at this, "Impossible even I was hired through an agent."

"Well, she didn't know that. So I told her that I had set up the meeting. Though when she gets there Saren's men will be there waiting for her."

"And where criminal, is that?" Thel walked over towering the SPARTAN and Sika by a foot and dwarfing every one else in the room causing an audible gulp from Fist.

"In the Alleyway before the lower markets. If you hurry now you might save her."

"He's all your Wrex," Charles reminded as he began to follow the N7 and Garrus to the exit with the 'Vadums in tow.

There was a scream then a blast from a shotgun before the Battlemaster's feet were heard racing to catch up with the rest of them. Earning a curious look from Sika, "I go where the fighting is," he grunted, while the N7 who was up in front with Charles just smirked.

"So I can ponder why Inspector Vakarian is here. But tell meh what brings an Alliance N7 to the Lower Wards?" Charles questioned as they left Chora's Den rifles raised in loose formation.

"My name is Lieutenant Commander Elizabeth Shepard. We're trying to gather evidence that proves that Saren is guilty of treason. This Quarian has something on him and you SPARTAN?"

"Sierra-009â€|. Saren's offenses in our district are considered to be very heinous. So I intend to have him brought to justice," Charles raced up the stairs of the alley pulling far a head from the rest of the group before making an inhuman leap leaving a still bolting Elizabeth and tow in the dust.

"Did he just jump twenty feet into the air?" Shepard staggered.

"More like thirty," Sika corrected.

A few minutes earlier Tali'Zorah nar Ordo was entering a dimly lit crimson alleyway where a hand full of mercs and one dutiful keeper was waiting for her. The young quarian's mind was still reeling over the recent events. Her pilgrimage had gone to hell the moment she recovered that Geth data catch and now against her better judgement she was going to make a deal with the Broker. Speaking of which where was the Shadow Broker or Fist for that matter?

"Where's the Shadow Broker?" she questioned her surroundings as she warily approached a Turian merc, "Where's Fist?"

"They'll be here. Where the evidence?" the contractor ask while running his hand down her arm eagerly.

The warning alarms in the Quarian's head hit DEFCON 1 as she receded away from the hired guns "No way. The deal's off."

The turian lead signal his salarian cohorts to move in as Tali instinctively tossed a flash bang into the fray disorienting the group long enough for her to take cover. Behind a supply crate Tali readied her shotgun and a few hacking programs to bring down their shields. What soon followed was series of untraceable shots echoing throughout the alley from what sounded like an railgun accompanied by an earth shattering crash that made Miss Zorah lose her footing.

Braving a look around Tali's eyes unwillingly followed the rill of blood trailing from the crushed remains of a turian beneath the boots of a crouching blackâ€|? Well whatever it was it was bigger than a Krogan.

Slowly getting up the monstrosity opened fired on the remaining mercs as it fell back to her position with inconceivable speed and precision. Startling her as the armored figure was now mere inches away from her person occasionally breaking a way from cover to open fire on the mercenaries.

"Ma'am are you all right?" it spoke in a calm male voice that seemed out of place in their current environment and yet oddly familiar. Tali looked up into the face of the dark behemoth frozen in it's glowing yellow eyes thinking it might have been some kind of machine till it blinked, "Ma'am are you okay?"

Soon another band of weapons fire joined the alley as a new squad entered. Whatever opposition the creature had left behind were quickly swept away in the torrent of overwhelming fire leaving only silence in its wake. Tali then found herself dumbstruck as the black titan offered her his free hand to help her up.

Staring at it for a moment she sighs before accepting it and finds herself easily brought to her to her feet in a strong yet gentle grip. An Alliance Marine then approaches them after sweeping the area for any remaining hostile with a look of concern adorn upon her face, "Are you all right?"

"Fist set me up! I knew I couldn't trust him!" Tali vented her built frustration over the week's events on the human.

"But are you Okay?" the black Goliath spoke again in a comforting paternal tone that contradict it's appearance. Composed all in black except it's golden eyes, Tali couldn't help but feel frightened by the ominous being that evoked a strange sense of déjà vu.

"I know how to look after myself. Not that I don't appreciate the help. Who are guys?" she was focusing on the human who was probably a few year older than Tali.

"My name's Lieutenant Commander Elizabeth Shepard of the Systems Alliance. An this handsome fellow to my left is C-sec Investigator Garrus Vakarian, and the charmer to my right is Urdnot Wrex a bounty hunter. As for the rest of the group we haven't had the pleasure of a proper introduction yet," She was looking at Charles with a look of annoyance. Obviously his serial number wasn't enough of an introduction.

Tali spots a subtle sigh of exasperation from the being in black though it was not audible, "My apologies I am Sierra-009 a SPARTAN II formerly of the UNSC. Known to the public as Mandalore The Innovator of the United Provinces of Mandalore."

There was a deep chuckle as a massive male Sangheili in silver archaic armor that looked quite formidable approached with a shorter a female Zealot in tow.

Elizabeth raised a curious eyebrow. "I'm sorry you must understand that SPARTAN II's do not give away their names right away. Like the Hanar Soul Name the privilege must be earned before it is given. I'm Thel'Vadum the Fifth."

Shepard nods understandingly while Tali reflects on the tidbit of information before jumping in surprise, "Wait! You're the Mandalore and you're the Arbiter! Keelah! I'm so sorry if I had realized I-Iâ€¦".

"It's fine reallyâ€¦. There's no need to worry about formalities. Right Thel?" the Mandalore interjected before the apology got to out of hand. Miss 'Zorah was fidgeting with her hands in embarrassment.

"It is actual a refreshing breath of fresh air not to see the rescued worshipping the very ground of my brother and the Mandalore walk upon for a change," the Zealot spoke up earning a chuckle from the Arbiter and SPARTAN II.

"Oh where are my manners. I'm Sika'Vadum granddaughter of the late Arbiter of Sanghelios Zuka'Vadum," she said in a formal bow of the head.

"My name is Tali. Tali'Zorah nar Ordo," she eventually responded after taking a moment to accept that she was in the presence of the two men who gave her people a place in the universe again. "I'm on my pilgrimage."

"So your Rael's daughter? You have his eyes," the Mandalore spoke warmly causing an anonymous blush under Tali's visor before

continuing. "Shepard this is probably not the best place to be exchanging information. I recommend we use the Commonwealth Embassies for the time being till we figure this out. I also need to alert the Admiralty Board to what has transpired."

"What!? No!" Tali exclaimed desperately, "Mandalore please if my father finds out about this he'll be furious."

"What?" Elizabeth utters but is cut off by the Two.

"All right how about this. I'll say your proving to be an invaluable asset to a joint investigation between the Systems Alliance and Commonwealth?" The Mandalore negotiated before turning to Shepard, "Will that work for you Commander?"

"Actual I need to take this evidence to Ambassador Udina at the Alliance Embassy," Shepard obviously was not used to having someone else taking command of the situation.

"That'll work as well. Deal?" the SPARTAN made the offer.

"Deal," Tali and the N7 echo simultaneously.

No sooner did she entering the Alliance Embassy was Shepard barraged with a lecture from Ambassador Donnel Udina, "You aren't making my life easy, Shepard. Firefights in the wards? An all out assault on Chora's Den? Do you know how many people?"

Whatever accusations that were to come soon fell to a deaf note when the Udina noticed two individuals in particular with the group behind her. "The Arbiter of Sanghelios and Mandalore the Innovator. M-My humblest apologies I was unaware that you were visiting today," the human representative began grovel to the floor.

"Please forgive our intrusion ambassador. We are here to present the findings of our joint investigation with the Commander," Thel's voice carried weight as the human embassy filled with the collection of various races.

"Really? I was unaware that the Commonwealth was investigating Arterius as well," Udina expressed curiously.

"Yes, very much so. With the interrogation results and physical evidence that is now in the custody of Commonwealth Guard we have a strong case to present against Saren Arterius to your Council," Charles emphasized with distaste he had been studying the Spectre's file during their walk to the embassy. To say he was feeling anything but contempt for the Turian would have been an understatement.

"Interrogation?" Captain Anderson chimed in.

"We interrogated Fist to gain a motive and with the shipping manifests for crates littered with narcotics and Saren's signature of approval. The only thing better than this is the recording recovered," Charles gestured to the Quarian

"I thought Quarians rarely left Flotilla let alone Commonwealth space, how by chance did you come across this information Ms. Udina asked for her name

"My name is Tali, Tali'Zorah nar Ordo." The hidden annoyance in her mannerisms was caught only by the SPARTAN as he read each insignificant act like it was a second language to him.

Charles could help but smirk in a way the quarians were a lot like the Mandalorians even more so to SPARTANS. Living in their armor for most of their lives forced the SPARTANS to rely on reading subtle gestures of body language to express what their anonymous faces could not. Though why she was so nervous around him was still confusing. He remembered the first time when he meet Sika she was terrified of him at first. Now it's almost impossible to separate her from him when she visited. Making an inaudible yielding sigh of frustration the Mandalore accepted another loss to understanding the minds of the opposite sex.

"I thought the geth fried their memory cores when they died. Some kind of defense mechanism." Captain Anderson spoke up bringing Charles's focus back to the conversation.

"How did you manage to preserve the memory core?" The Commander spoke up as Charles made a mental note to watch his suits video feed later to find out what he missed.

"My people created the geth. If you're quick, careful, and lucky small catches of data can sometimes be saved." Tali began to explain, "Most of the core was wiped clean. But, I salvaged something from it's audio banks."

Starting up her Omni-tool Tali played the file for everyone to hear "Eden Prime was a major victory!" the voice of a turian male played in the embassy, "The beacon has brought us one step closer to finding the Conduit."

"That's Saren's voice. This proves he was involved in the attack!" Anderson exclaimed with what could be described as joy.

"What is this Conduit?" Thel spoke making his presence known to the group once again.

"It must involve the beacon we discovered at Eden Prime. Maybe some lost Prothean technology, perhaps a weapon?" the Alliance Captain spoke up again.

"Waitâ€¦ There's more. Saren wasn't working alone." The young Quarian spoke up again before replaying the bank.

"Eden Prime was a major victory! The beacon has brought us one step closer to finding the Conduit." Saren's voice repeated.

"And one step closer to the return of the Reapers." Spoke a second voice that clicked in Charles's memory

"I don't recognize the other voice. The one talking about Reapers," Donnel chimed in.

"I do. Her name is Benezia T'Soni an Asari Matriarch," the SPARTAN spoke up.

"How do you know her?" Elizabeth asked with some suspicion in her

voice

"Twelve years back I was attempting a merger between MARS Industries and Serrice Council," he pauses as he brought back the memory. "At the time my synthetics branchâ€¦well more specifically our medical division had developed a feasible means to bolstering the Quarrian immune systems. If implanted with an amp similar a biotic amplifier it could bolster and compensate for their weakened immune systems."

This grabbed Tali's attention, "Whaâ€¦what happened?" she was practically hanging on his every word now resulting in a remorseful sigh from the SPARTAN.

"Serrice Council is renowned for their amps so a merger would be ideal to speeding up the development for a more resilient amplifier." Taking a breath Charles continued, "The merger could have brought the nano amps on to the market years ago instead of still being in development today."

Tali felt her heartbreak as the Mandalores remorsefully continued, "Benezia is a major stock holder thus her voice carried much weight. She became adamant about stopping the merger when we announced our primary business goal to be accomplished from the merger," Tali's hands were clenched in fists of rage. "Two months later Serrice Council started their "Keeping the Stars Clean" marketing campaign."

"That's why they started to donate a small percentage of their profits to citadel law enforcement agencies? A damn hate campaign!" Elizabeth was disgusted.

While Wrex inaudibly muttered, "Damn two faced squid heads." Garrus shook his head a little more violently than the others.

"As fascinating as this history lesson is I'm was curios about those Reaper the Matriarch mentioned," the ambassador redirected the conversation.

Tali only nodded as she recalled the information, "According to the data, the Reapers were a hyper advanced machine race that existed 50,000 years ago. They hunted the Protheans to total extinction, and then just vanished. At least that is what the geth believe."

"Sounds a little far-fetched," Donnel was hesitant with the tidbit.

"The visions on Eden Prime - I understand it now. I witnessed the Reapers wiping out the Protheans," Shepard spoke up rubbing her forehead to remember.

"The geth revere them like gods, the pinnacle of all non-organic life. They believe Saren knows how to bring the Reapers back." Tali finished, while Undina scoffed in doubt.

"Regardless if the council believe us about the Reaper's, those audio files prove Saren is a traitor," Anderson exclaims.

"We should present our findings to the council right away," Arbiter spoke up, while the Mandalore was reflecting on other more ancient

matters, 'can't beâ€|.'

"What about 'Zorah?" Sika spoke up.

"You saw me in the alley Commander," Tali interjected. "You know what I can do. Let me join you."

"What about your Pilgrimage?" The Commander cut in.

"The Pilgrimage proves we are willing to give of ourselves for the greater good. What does it say about me if I turn my back on this?" The quarian countered, "Saren has become a danger to this entire galaxy. My Pilgrimage can wait."

"I'll take all the help I can get," Elizabeth welcomed her smiling.

"Good then you wouldn't mind adding on one more," Charles stepped forward.

"You too?" Garrus spoke over the N7's shoulder.

"I was going to place Miss 'Zorah under my protective custody but this works out for the better."

"How so?" Shepard raised a brow.

"Both you and the Mandalore want Saren's head for your respective mantles and Miss Zorah's rights as a Commonwealth Citizen require she be placed in protective custody pending sentencing of the accused?" Thel stepped in again forcing a 'huh?' from the group.

"He means, till Saren and the guilty party are removed as a threat. I cannot legally nor morally leave my charge. Unless I temporarily placed the said charge in an adequate level of custody." The SPARTAN II continued after tagging himself back in, "When I intervened in the alley I accepted the responsibility of looking after her."

"Well that's convenient," Shepard teased. "Welcome aboard you two."

"Thanks. You won't regret this," Charles could hear a hidden smile under the Quarian's visor

"It'd be an honor to serve with Lioness of Elysium." The Mandalorian added with a respectful nod.

"Well, in the mean time Anderson and I will go ahead to get things ready with the Council. Take a few minutes to collect yourself, then meet us in the Tower." Udina spoke after turning to the Commonwealth Leaders with a bow, "Mandalore, Arbiter."

They merely nodded respectfully as Anderson and Udina take their leave before their focus falls-back the assortment before them. "Well I must tell Chieftain Bracktanus of these resent events my Brother as well as the Admiralty Board and Unggoy Senate," Thel broke the silence, "Sister, I will need your assistance in providing a proper report on today's events."

"Be sure to mention the Reapers. I want our joint intelligences

looking into this Arbiter." Charles looking down to Tali fumbling with her hands nervously, "make sure to keep Rael calm we want to keep the situation under control."

"I will remind him who watches over his kit."

After acquiring a dual confirmative from the siblings they took their leave for the Commonwealth district. Leaving the SPARTAN to his thoughts and the Embassy in awkwardly silence till the N7 casually waved the others to follow.

"Come on the Udina is presenting the Quarrians evidence to the council," Anderson rallied the group as they raced up the steps to the meeting where they heard Saren's voice echoing on the load speakers.

"Eden Prime was a major victory! The beacon has brought us one step closer to finding the Conduit."

"And one step closer to the return of the Reapers." Benezia chimed in once more for all to hear.

"You wanted proof. There it is," the Alliance Ambassador spoke with a smug tone and smirk before turning to the approaching group earning many stares. "To further our case Mandalore the Innovator will present his finding regarding Saren's betrayal."

Retrieving a remote holo-projector from his armor the SPARTAN took Udina's place before tossing the pad into the air allowing it to ascending a few stories via mental commands from his HUD. "Thank you Ambassador. Councilors at approximately four months to this day C-Sec was seeing an increase of illegal narcotics flooding the streets of the Citadel. Thanks to a tip from Executor Pallin I became aware that the recent flood of narcotics was flowing from the Commonwealth District."

Charles paused to let this seep in, "After acquiring further information from a trusted source who wishes to remain anonymous. I was directed to Chora's Den as the main source of this epidemic." Taking his time to bringing up the shipping manifest along with the forwarded images of the evidence collected from Commonwealth Guard Sierra-009 continued. "As you see there are multiple of irregularities in the payment methods in the manifests. But more importantly they were approved by the defendant to forgo screening. Sentinel please bring up the chemical analysis results procured by CG crime labs.

"One moment please, bringing up results now," the image of the emerald adolescent AI in her latest fashion statement a late night clubbing dress cut short to please the masses with a matching green vest hanging loosely to reveal a slender back appeared on the holopad. The few ambassadors present that had been Anti-AI were clearly conflicted at the moment judging by the mixed silent retorts.

With a anonymous role of the eye Charles went on, "As you see councilors the results show that Fist was in the possession over two tons of Red Sand and Minagen X3, and a quarter of a ton of Hallex. All approved by Spectre Saren Arterius to forgo inspection."

There was a grow of murmurs coming from the spectators that unfazed Charles. "Fist was captured and placed under our custody for interrogation where we uncovered a possible primary objective for Saren's actions that I would like to present as well."

Catching his breath the SPARTAN continued, "Though the interrogation was performed in a way that is inadmissible in a Citadel court. I hope the Council would humor us for a moment. Those of you who are a bit squeamish might want to look away."

The video played from the beginning of entering Fist's office there were a few snivels and gags in the background when Thel removed crime-lord's right arm. The Mandalore felt a wave of relief that his suit had air filters and was vacuumed sealed. The vid ended with Charles leaving Chora's Den with the others.

"This evidence is irrefutable," perhaps it was just 009 but the Turian Councilor seemed ashamed. "Representatives. Saren will be stripped of his Spectre status and all efforts will be made to bring him in to answer for his crimes."

"I still cannot believe Matriarch Benezia is involved in this," the Asari Councilor said.

"I can," the Mandalore quipped earning a glare from Tevos.

"Considering the crimes your own adopted race has committed you shouldn't be so quick to judge Mandalore," she fired back.

"The sins of our ancestors," he waved it off. "The genophage on the other hand was not too long ago for the Asari if I'm not mistaken?" The Battlemaster stared at the back of the SPARTAN in shock.

"We were not given much choice on the matter we were at the brink of losing the war," the Salarian councilor interjected.

"Don't you dare lecture me about war Councilor," the SPARTAN's voice never rose as his words stilled the council chamber. "For almost three decades I watched countless worlds burned till nothing more than charred cinder and glass remained. Civilians were slaughtered like animals and the prisoners of war became meat for our enemy's fill."

"Tell me have any of you even been to Tuchanka?" no response. "During my first aid missions for the local clans a Shaman brought me to a valley riddled with the remains of the unborn and would be mothers being picked at by scavengers."

"Of all the forms of genocide I've witnessed your grandparents' final solution stole the show," he let his words hang there for a moment. Wrex was the most still as he stared into the SPARTAN's back. "We've been cleaning up your broken crockery for the past two decades."

"Explain," the turian spoke with venom.

"Well for starters we've been trying to undo the recent damage the Salarian STG has done."

"Stop! That is tier 0 classified! You shouldn't even have knowledge of that," Councilor Valern was almost hysterical now. All eyes were on him as he attempted to recompose himself. "Mandalore I'm sure I don't have to remind you that infiltrating our network is an act of war."

"I didn't have to. I was there during a relief mission remember?" This caused a murmur among the councilors, "At first I thought they were terrorists so I put the filthy buggers down. Later interrogations proved other wise." The Salarian's pupils dilated as he attempted to contain his rage with this new bit of information.

"Wait what do you mean?" Wrex was clearly lost.

"In simpler terms it appears the Mandalore has been trying to undo the damage of the genophage," Tali spoke with an approving tone of the SPARTAN. 'Odd and here I thought she hated meh or something,' the confusion echoed through Charles's mind.

"What is that look for?" She soon asked.

"Uh? Tali, he's just standing there unreadable as always," the turian investigator finding himself more and more lost as he hovering over Shepard's shoulder.

A light chuckle brought the focus back to the SPARTAN, "It's a Commonwealth thing Garrus with the few races that usually keep their features hidden we learn to read emotion through the slight movements and gestures."

"Oh."

"If I may interject," Udina cut in clearly uninterested in the cultural lesson. "But, what do you plan on doing about Saren."

"Saren is a rogue agent on the run for his life." The Turian councilor practically leaped for the change of subject, "He no longer has the rights or resources of a Spectre. The Council has stripped him of his position."

"That is not good enough! You know he's hiding somewhere in the Traverse. Send your feet in!" Udina roared.

"A fleet cannot track down one man," the salarian representative spoke his eyes still dilated.

"A fleet could secure the entire region." Udina persisted, "Keep the geth from attacking any more colonies."

"Or, it could trigger a war with the terminus systems! We won't be dragged into a galactic confrontation over a few dozen human colonies!" the Turian councilor countered.

"Every time humanity asks for help you ignore us," Elizabeth jumps in.

"Shepard's right I'm sick of this council and its anti-human bull shit," the Ambassador roared.

"You can't have some highly trained extremist with a technologically advance military force backing him prancing around in your backyard," the authority in the SPARTAN's voice was intimidating as ever. He was fueling another a stir among the masses. "Either you do something or I WILL!"

"There is another solution," the Asari Councilor cut in before another incident occurred.

"What?" Charles was already halfway down the podium with director of MIN (Mandalorian Intelligence Network) on a secured line.

"A way to stop Saren that does not require fleets or armies," raising an eyebrow from behind his helmet he turned around to face the council again.

"No! It's too soon! Humanity is not ready for the responsibilities that come with joining the Spectres." the turian protested.

"You don't have to send a fleet into the traverse and the Ambassador gets his human Spectre." Shepard spoke with a surprising level of charisma, "Everybody's happy." Then giving a nod to the SPARTAN.

"Agreed, a small collection of specialist would be an effective way of tracking down a rogue asset," said the Mandalore.

"Commander Shepard - step forward," Asari representative spoke, "It is the decision of the Council that you be granted all the powers and privileges of the Special Tactics and Reconnaissance branch of the Citadel"

"Spectres are not trained but chosen." The Salarian recited as the number of spectators continued to grow, "Individuals forged in the fire of service and battle those who's actions elevate them above the rank and file"

"Spectres are an ideal a symbol." The Asari councilor took her place in the ceremony "The embodiment of courage determination and self-reliance. They are the right hand of the Council, instruments of our will."

"Spectres bear a great burden." Councilor Sparatus stressed with a hinted of a strong military background in his tone and stance, "They are the protectors of galactic peace, both our first and last line of defense. The safety of the galaxy is theirs to uphold."

"You are the first human Spectre Commander. This is a great accomplishment for you and your entire species," the Asari emphasized.

"I'm honored, Councilor." Elizabeth said with a bow earning a smirk from Charles glancing to his right and back the others behind her were wearing similar faces.

"We're sending you into the Traverse after Saren. He's a fugitive from justice, so you are authorized to use any means necessary to apprehend or eliminate him" the Salarian councilor gave the target.

"Any idea where to find him?" the Commander spoke readily.

"We will forward any relevant files to Ambassador Udina." Turian answered.

"This meeting of the Council is adjourned," finished the Asari.

"Congratulations Commander," Anderson shook the Shepard's hand with paternal pride in his voice.

"We've got a lot of work to do, Shepard. You're going to need a ship a crew suppliesâ€¦" the human ambassador began to reflect.

"Well, I should be able to help with the supplies. I'm sure MARS Industries can spare some product and me various intelligence contacts should help," the Mandalore spoke as he shook the N7's hand "I just need to make a few calls get things in order. Meet me in the commonwealth district when you have a moment."

"Where should I go?" Tali mumbled while racing her hands nervously.

'Guess she is still scared of me,' Charles thought as he watched the pair of bioluminescent eyes breaching her visor avoid contact with his synthetic ones, 'oh-well trust has to be re-earned, that interrogation vid probably didn't help thing.' 009 hoped a little charm would ease the situation, "Well the choice is up to you Miss 'Zorah, you can either join me as I make a few calls or if it's okay with you Commander Shepard you can stay with her?"

"I have no problem with it," Tali sighed in relief. "Though I'm surprised you would leave your charge in someone else's hands," the human Spectre began to quiz the SPARTAN.

"Besides Elysium you have an impressive track record and have a level of military training comparable to our Tier twos. You'll do just fine it's not like your protecting a civilian."

"I see you were doing some side research on your way up," she toyed with him, prying a giggle from the quarian.

"Not really," the SPARTAN responded nonchalantly. "I just make a habit of keeping track of the universe's premier talent. To be honest with ya most of you were on my radar long before any of this."

"Really?" the Spectre was hoping to pry out more

"MIN analysts are very good at their jobs; and I've memories a little over half of the list,"

"And that's for?" Wrex interjected.

"Identifying possible assets or threats."

Garrus made to open his mouth but the Mandalore read his mind, "and only time will tell which you lot areâ€¦. Later." Charles waved goodbye before heading for the nearest transit to get to his

office.

3. Chapter 2

Chapter 2

"Rael, I understand your concerns, but I think your over looking the fact that your daughter can look after herself just fine," the black armored figure persisted. "Look at the facts, she was the top of her self-defense class in for her mandatory pilgrimage training. Which we had reformed mind you to give 'em a leg up in the world."

"Regardless she is not your daughter Charles you wouldn't understand," Mr. 'Zorah quickly countered.

"Shall I reiterate the drill sergeant's report?" Charles gestured to the official transcript in hand for the go head from the father. "Written by a seasoned Mandalorian might I add. We're not an easy lot to please, remember?"

"Perhaps you would like to refresh my memory," Rael quipped.

Charles lifts up holopad to bring up the last report, "Let's see. Commonwealth Colonial National Guard training reports for Pilgrimages candidates of 137_ABY-2,183 of the planet Ordo," he deviates for a moment, "by the way did you enjoy getting to raise your daughter planet side?"

"Oh, stop being a-a, what was that word you used to call Han after one of his quips?" Rael questioned.

"Cheeky Bastard?"

"Yes! Stop being a cheeky bosh'tet (Quarian insult)." Rael was clearly getting sick of the planet-side line being held over his head, "And yes thank you again for the millionth time. Have you told her yet?"

"I was just trying to make a pointâ€¦and no I have not revealed the secret identify of her mysterious Uncle Charlie," the SPARTAN cleared his throat for dramatic effect before looking back to the log.

"From the logbook of MAR trooper, Drill Sergeant Dan Esok Mereel, 'Now that I've identified all the di'kutes (idiots) that wouldn't even last a millisecond in a real tracyn-akaanir (fire-fight). Let me make a brief report about our star pupil Miss Tali'Zorah that wee lass got the ramikadyc (The commando state of mind, for you non Mandalorians moxie and lots of it). I swear give that girl a shotgun and she'll perform brain surgery right before your eyes and by far the smartest combat engineer I've seen in a decade. Definitely has the markings of an ARM candidate. Kind of reminds me of an ace an old Navy buddy of mine discovered a few years back on Concord Dawn. I think the kid's name was Kal or something apparently he had a natural affinity for high explosives. I conclude my report stating that Miss 'Zorah is combat ready and will be graduating this years course. She can Hukaat'kama (Watch my six) Anytime."

"You think I'm being over protective?" Rael chuckled as he replayed

the last line in his head.

"A bit yeah. Think about it this way Rael. How many times have we pulled each other's arses out of the fire? Before your desk I mean?" Charles questioned.

"Too many. With both you and Thel. Shame I got old," Rael mused.

"Sith. Imperial War was messy but we always had someone to watch our six. Rael I'll watch over her no matter what. You know that." Charles continued. "After all Uncle Charlie keeps his promises."

"Yeah I know," he sighs with a smile obscured by his visor. "Keelah. Where does the time go Charles? She's twenty-two now." Rael leans back for a moment with a deep breath, "I guess I had let her roam out of the cage eventually."

"So how is Han and the rest of your old squad-mates doing?" Charles decided to deviate to the "Good-Old-Days" and give Rael a reprieve from being father for a second.

"Hmm? Well Han and I still think we should retake the homeworld but the Suit-wetter is stonewalling us like usual. As always Shala is asking for what your opinion on the matter is." He recalled off the top of his head, "While the rest live peaceful lives as parents or grandparents in the fleet or on one of the many mixed colonies."

"Rael I don't think it's wise to keep calling Zaal that. One of these days he's going snap and pull out the old sniper rifle." Charles thoughts wander to a few of the perfect head shots Zaal took the liberty of engraving into his memory, "Anyway I wanted more than a missions report."

"Ripa called a few days ago we're planing on meeting up later this week to celebrate Remembrance. Everyone else is doing fine I think Shala still has a thing for you but then again most women do." Rael laughs at the last bit knowing full well which way the wind was going to blow with this subject.

Charles raises an eyebrow in annoyance, "That's nonsense and you know it."

Rael's laughter is soon overshadowed by another, "Your memory must be slipping. You lucky bosh'tet!" Han'Gerrel appeared next to Rael's, "Because I remember how you had a following that crossed all the way into enemy territory."

"Nice to see you too Han," 009 rolled his eyes behind his visor with a smirk.

"That sweet sith girl what was her name again?" Han pressed on.

"Saarai I think and what was that Lethan Twi'lek's name he also spared?" Rael continued where Han left off.

"Her name is Talon and I don't like making a habit of killing women. I spared their lives so that's the only reason why they helped,"

Charles sighed in annoyance at the two former Assault Recon Marines.

"Suuurreâ€|that night Talon snuck into your tent were all negotiations," Han persisted.

"Believe what you want," the mandalore's unique accent hid his amusement for the imagination of quarian duo had. "I still haven't gotten an answer from ya Rael."

"Well Keelah aren't you a buzz kill. All business and no play as usualâ€|eh?" Rael joked.

"I'll let you girls get back to gossiping after I get my authorization," the Mandalore took his seat behind his desk. "I got much to do, I'll chat you lot up some other time."

"That bad huh? All right I'll authorize the transfer to your custody," Rael's tone turned serious. "You look after her. Promise me that much Charles."

"I gave you my word all those years ago." The SPARTAN was solemn now as he watched his former comrades press a few buttons on his omni-tool, "I will keep it, no matter what."

"It's done," Rael looked defeated for a moment before recomposing himself. "Keelah se'lai Charles"

"Ret'urcye mhi (goodbye; maybe we'll meet again) Rael, Han," and with that the transmission ended as the SPARTAN began to pull up a multiple of files on his terminal. Glancing at his suit's internal clock reading half past 19 hundred if this was Mandalore he'd be enjoying a charming sunset right about now instead of a mountain of paperwork. With a sigh he continued getting things in order while keeping Udina and Anderson up-to-date with his end of things.

In the past few hours of tailing Commander Shepard's every move Tali'Zorah was beginning to think that the galaxy liked dumping their problems at the Commander's feet. Surprisingly enough she just smiled and helped in whatever way she could.

Things had started off with Samesh Bhatia trying to recover the body of his beloved wife Nirali which was being held by Alliance brass for testing and ending with them proving that Sha'ira was not to blame for revealing Ambassador Xeltan's secrets. Six hours later Chief Williams was still fuming over the day's first problem.

"It's just not right. We risk our skins and some damn pencil pusher has the authority to deny us a proper burial," Ashley a rather attractive alliance marine with her brown hair done up in a bun began again before catching herself in front of her superior officer. "Ohâ€|sorry Ma'am. Thank you again for sorting that mess out for Samesh. Nirali deserved better."

This earned a silent giggle from Tali and counter glare from Ashley that screamed 'shut it!' while Shepard simply decided to ignore the tension growing between the two.

"It's not a problem Ash I was happy to help," she replied before renting a shuttle at a rapid transit terminal.

It was the typical rental model designed to get you to where you were going but never fast enough to avoid the high cab fare. Tali sat in the back and watched the subtle change in the skyway traffic's consistency of vehicle makes. The X3M model shuttles more commonly driven by Citadel species were soon replaced by the various models of airspeeders regularly seen in Commonwealth space.

"Commander are we heading towards the Commonwealth district now?" the young Quarian asked.

"Yeah I figured it was time to pick up your bodyguard," Elizabeth teased as the Quarian felt her cheeks warm.

"I can take care of myself. I don't need his protection," Tali noted the slow increase in her suits temperature on her HUD's readout and was counting her blessings that her face wasn't visible.

"Really? Sounds like a dream deal to me having a knight in shining armor like the Mandalore looking after you," said Ash with surprisingly enthusiasm. "And with a reputation like his you wouldn't have to worry about you six anytime soon."

"I'm surprise," Shepard spoke with a little mischief in her voice. "When we first met you in the alley I was sure you were going to have a fangirl moment when he introduced himself."

Tali was on the defensive now as she tried to come off half-honest. "I did not. I was shocked to be in the presence of two of the most influential and respected leaders of Commonwealth space."

They were landing now and Ashley felt the need to make one last remark before leaving the privacy of the rental, "He is kind of cute for a cyborgâ€¦in a tall, dark, mysterious kind of way."

"Yeah," Tali slipped as she covered her audio speakers in vain attempt to catch the confession.

The two women in the front looked back with ravenous smiles for gossip that sent 'Zorah back to her academy days with her friends naming off their current crushes.

"I'm sorry what was that?" said the N7 staring down the cornered Quarian with a smirk.

"Iâ€¦um well," Tali watched as the remains of her calm demeanor evaporated.

"Well, what?" Ashley stepped in clearly excited.

"Keelah, it's high school all over again," Tali muttered, "I grew up hearing war stories about the Mandalore and his SPARTANS from my father."

"So it was like meeting childhood hero for the first time," Shepard cut in sensing where this was going while the Chief whistled.

Existing the shuttle a sea people consisting of the various races of the commonwealth and citadel were a mixed with in the colorful

crowds. The founding Commonwealth races were in the thick but a multiple of species from liberated worlds were also visible. The tree dwellers of Kashyyyk that towered over diverse collection were only overshadowed only by Jiralhanae and Sangheili along with a few enigmatic Kaminoans.

200 millennia of evolution bore a more humanoid Jiralhanae in appearance and an obvious reduction in height over the generations to a level little above that of the Wookiees. While their former Sangheili rivals dwarfed the mass thanks to time spent on a gravity rich Sanghelios.

Unggoy were present almost everywhere showcasing their extravagant environmental suits. The two hundred thousand year period of development had been kind to them. Many were now standing eye to eye with humanity and were easily mistakable for quarians if you didn't remember to count the digits.

[Codex/Species Entry The Unggoy: During in the assimilation of the Quarian people into the Commonwealth in 119 ABY. Unggoy designers fell in love with the quarian's intricate suit design and began incorporate various quarian artistic styles into their own. Quarians might state that the Unggoy went over the top with integrating their 'look.' Many mandalorian were reportedly relieved that the former Mando fab was finally over.]

Ashley couldn't help but stare at some of the locals as a Rodian and a Mon Calamari pair passed by in deep conversation. "Try not to stare. Some races view it as an insult or a challenge and don't break eye contact when talking to someone it can also be viewed as an insult." Tali began to go down the list of things to do and not to do, "Watch where you step not all races come to eye height with us and apologies when you bump into someone some races view it as a threat."

"Can we breath," Elizabeth joked forcing a laugh from Williams.

"If you must," Tali sarcastically answered. "Avoid getting into any fights with Mandalorians, Sangheili, or Jiralhanae. All of them are seasoned warriors they don't go down easy nor do they tend to back down if you insult them. Though Jiralhanae are by far most nonviolent of the three Military Council Races so chances of insulting one are slim."

[Codex/Species Entry The Jiralhanae: Once a savage and blood thirsty people originating from the planet Doisac. The Jiralhanae had evolved over millennia to be nonviolent culture. For 200,000 years the Jiralhanae have been learning to control their insatiable blood lust and over many generations of social reforms they succeeded. Becoming the first known pacifist warrior species ever recorded in history. During their first reappearance on the galactic community in 110 ABY the Jiralhanae were commonly mistaken as a lost remnant of the Jedi Order or as a race of force sensitives for many years. This is mainly because of their almost supernatural control of their five primary senses to a degree that their awareness is often mistaken for force affinity.

Commonly viewed as peaceful giants by today's society the Jiralhanae are known to not even intentionally harm small insects or pests. As per their mantle they view all life sacred. Renowned for their

immense patience and self-restraint it was no wonder that they were able to easily befriend the Elcor. Resulting in the Jiralhanae securing an unprecedented number of trading agreements with the Elcor people and develop many strong political ties with Counts of Dekuuna.

Forswearing meat the former carnivores have adopted much of the Forerunner Mantle and various practices such as the vegetarian life style and the understanding for the importance of maintaining a balance between passive and aggressive states. With the help of the Sangheili they honed their warrior code and military craft to balance their peaceful lifestyles.

Modern Jiralhanae are now known for their incessant avoidance of violence of any kind viewing it as regression into their more feral past. There are only two known exceptions to this belief. If a challenge of honor is made they are required to defend themselves or when a life is jeopardized especially those of innocent blood.

Jiralhanae warriors are known to be patient on the battlefield and only make quick decisions when haste is of the upmost essence to save lives. Leading to the common saying, "A Jiralhanae's fight is always ethical."]

"Warrior cultures?" the Marine retorted.

"She means to say that they all have had training dating back to their childhood, and military service is requirement for all citizens," Shepard explained.

Ashley laughed at this, "I'm not joking Ash, I've fought a few of their renegades in the past. They were no push overs."

"Ma'am are you telling me a N7s couldn't handle a close encounter with a few mercs from commonwealth space," Williams sneered.

"Chief Williams," the Commander's voice became stern. "Never underestimate a rogue from commonwealth space especially a Jiralhanae Traditionalist. They might not be as well equipped as their standard military counterparts but they are just as dangerous."

Shepard was now pointing to the faded scar running down the left side of her face. "A mandalorian vibroblade did this and if it wasn't for the TGR Troopers accompanying us during the OP we would have lost a lot more people." The commander became silent before tightening her fists then murmuring, "Ke nu'jurkadir sha Mando'ade."

"What hell does that mean?" the confusion written Ashley's face didn't even register with Elizabeth. She was so deep in her own past memories that she failed to notice the missing 'Ma'am' in Ashley's outburst.

"It's mandalorian," Tali spoke up, "the Drill Sergeant for my pilgrimage a TGR taught it to my class along with a few other sayings, It means 'Don't mess with Mandalorians.'"

There was silence among the three for a moment till it was broken by a forth voice alien to the group that resonated in a deep and powerful tone. "Excuse me, Commander Elizabeth Shepard?"

'A Sangheili no doubt,' turning around the spectre wish she had put some money down as she looked up to meet a towering form of an aged Commonwealth Guard.

"Yes," she asked.

"Greetings I'm Lead Officer Ripa'Saham it is an Honor," he said with a bow of the head. He was a colossus compared to the rest of them in his marble white armor. "The Mandalore asked me and my fellow Guardsmen to keep an eye open for your arrival. May I be of aid and escort your party to the embassy."

"Lead the way."

Ripa responded with a respectful nod before leading them through the crowds, "I do apologies for any difficulties you may have had navigating the crowds today. It is beginning of Remembrance Week it will be a while till things regain their calm."

"Keelah! I forgot to send a vid to my Father and my Auntie Shala," Tali immediately felt a pang of guilt.

"Fear not Lady 'Zorah for the week is young and time is plenty," Ripa soon replied.

"Wait how do you know who she is and what's remembrance week?" Ashley took the words right out of Elizabeth's mouth as they crossed an overpass.

"Same way I know who you are Gunnery Chief Williams," Ripa turned around with the Sangheili equivalent of a smile. "Mandalore The Innovator himself sent detailed reports on your squad mates to Commonwealth Guard; and if I may be so bold it is an honor to be in the presence of General Williams granddaughter." He finished with a bow.

"How do you know about my Grandfather?" Ashley questioned.

"Well I wasn't always a member of the Guard. I was once a proud member of the Ascetics of Sanghelios. I retired after the last war," Ripa finished with pride.

"Ah that would explain your mannerism," Tali said with a nod. Noticing the two confused humans she quickly explained, "Ascetic training like that of the Spartan Vs' requiring more than just military training in tactics and combat. It's more of a way of life as they follow their four ideals honor, justice, nobility, and sacrifice. Like the SPARTANS the only true way out is through death."

"If it is such a life commitment what is he doing here?" Ashley questioned again.

"Age Chief Williams. Much of my battle song has been added to my families poem. Now is the time for the younger generation to add more glorious acts of valor to it," Ripa continued to walk with zeal in his step. "I have brought the Saham name much glory and to my disbelief I was honored with an opportunity to pass on my legacy to the local guard of this district."

"I don't quite follow?" Shepard was lost with the Chief.

"To be chosen out of a sea of such Noble Warriors by the Reaper himself no less. There are very fewer honors in life young ones." Ripa looks to the Embassy tower only few minutes away now and does the Sangheili traditional tribute of bringing his fist to his heart to feel his honor flow through him. "To be remembered by such a honored Warriorâ€¦ Strengthens the Blood."

"But, how do you know of my grandfather and what is remembrance week," Ashley persisted.

"Ah yes my apologies. General Williams name was given great mentioned in the historical holocrons of your Alliance. When our prosperous Commonwealth came into contact with the Citadel," The Lead Guard took a breath. "It was my duty as an Ascetic of my people to study the wars and the battles of our allies and enemies. To broaden our combat prowess."

"And remembrance week?" Ashley asked.

"There have been many wars over the continuing millennia Williams. It was proposed by the Mandalore himself as a time to remember and honor the brave the souls that fought and died for their people regardless of there allegiances," Tali began to recall. "We feast and spend time with family and friends. Some specie give their family or friends who are Veterans gifts but more commonly is the sharing of war stories of a family veteran or comrade."

"So basically it's a holiday for soldiers. So anyone can celebrate it?" Ashley asked.

"Yes heir of the Cunningly Humble General. We honor all who brave the fires of battle ruthless or virtuous it does not matter. Only the indomitable will to fight," Ripa spoke with a fire in his breast.

"So who is this Reaper?" Elizabeth was curious.

Ripa roars of laughter caused the trio to jump out their skins. The weathered Ascetic was now breathing heavily to recompose himself, "A fine jest Lioness of Elysium you have already met him have you not?"

"The Reaper, Demon, or the Black Death were some of nicknames that have stuck with the Mandalore since the Human-Covenant War over two hundred thousand years ago." Tali spoke as if she was reciting a textbook.

"Yes! The illustrious Black Death of the Great War. The Demon that took the left mandibles of the fabled Rtas'Vadum with sound alone after being blinded by the noble Zealot's blade no less! And Rumored to have bested both Arbiters Ripa'Moramee and Thel'Vadam in single combat," Ripa continued as if reciting a poem. "Slayer of the Liar of Regret and his treacherous kin and survivor of the Parasite. To have fought with and to be remembered by such an embodiment of Nobility truly strengthens the blood."

The "Reaper" had final just finished his end of the deal with

Alliance a mere minutes ago and was now finishing the designs for a replacement model to his old Mark VII. Hovering over the holo-tank with the projection labeled Mark XIII, he had decided that this model was going to be different compared to previous mandalorian models and stick with his UNSC roots in appearance instead of giving it the traditional Mando feel he had been contemplating.

_[Codex/Technology Entry_Spartan V MJOLNIR GEN3 Powered Assault Armors IIX-XII: had a more traditional beskar'gam (Mandalorian armor) theme in appearance. Resembling of mix between classic and neo crusader armors, with the durability and reliability of MJOLNIR.]

Charles was too sentimental to deviate from Dr. Halsey's original theme and go completely local. Like the time worn combat knife he always carried Charles felt the need to do the same with his family and origins. The Mark XIII would be a more streamline and reminiscent of the old mark IV and his VII, but was more advance than any model yet conceived.

"Charles if you do that then this model will only be compatible with a SPARTAN II physiology. Such a design could permanently injure or kill a Five," Sentinel voiced her concern from his desk with her feet hanging over the edge.

"I know Senti. This will be a replacement for my VII," he sighs. "This armor isn't getting any younger and current models are incompatible with my physiology."

"True," as she recalled the humane methods the mandalore choose to augment the Fives. "You never could bring yourself to make them endure the same horrors you faced during augmentation."

"Well because of that their basically enhanced SPARTAN Ones. The only difference between 'em and the original Orions is the more pleasant augmentation procedure and height factor," sighing in frustration. "Though the improvements did bring 'em up to a combat effectiveness of your average III the real problem isâ€¦|."

"Bone density. I know Charles," she produced a supportive smile. "You never did like inflicting pain, did you?"

"The art of assassination requires delivering a silently quick and painless experience," he self-consciously rustled in his armor. "Learning all the painless ways meant learning all the loud ones to avoid."

"Ironical it makes you uniquely qualified for interrogations," looking at the current framework she whistled. "One thing is for sure this new armor will be the object of envy. Though If you don't mind me saying it's about time that you started thinking about yourself for a change."

This produced a rare laugh from the SPARTAN, "I think I do enough for myself."

"Really? So who wanted to get this office furnished?" Sentinel was quick to remind. "It's like pulling teeth to get you to selfishly splurge."

"I got that," he points to the weapons racks seamlessly hidden in the wall and then escape lifts, "and then I had those installed"

"Your own the wealthiest corporation in Commonwealth space and you live from your offices and your personal quarters on the Spirit of Fire," she had a point. "Buy yourself a house or a really nice apartment there is more to the universe than weapons and armor."

Hearing a growing concern in the AI's voice the SPARTAN's gaze switched from the Mark XIII to the emerald adolescent flouting next to him, "In the three and a half decades I've known you you've never had an actual vacation."

"You need to start living again," he felt a pang of guilt tear at his insides as he watched the virtual tears running down Senti's cheeks. "None of it was your fault. Do you think any of them wanted you to live like this."

"Senti..." For the first time the Mandalore was lost for words as he mentally cursed Leonardo for passing on his memories to his 'daughter.' "I can't. I am just not ready yet. I appreciate your concern but now is not the time to do any soul-searching."

"Tribute, Harvest, and Reach were over two hundred thousand years ago," he struggling to listened with every virtual cry.

"Don't forget I was unconscious for most of it. Look I need sometime," he took a breath. "The years I've been awake there have been multiple of things to do. I promise I'll find a time, but not now. There is too much do and so little time to do it in."

Producing his pinkie for the AI's hard light form to grasp with both hands she smile a little, "Good thing your a man of your word."

With a simple nod he turn back to the armor and began to put on the finishing touches. "Though to start I am tired of a black on black color scheme. I feel the need for something different."

Pausing with hands on his chin then leaning back on a heel for a minute or two, before he snapping of his fingers, " Dark olive trim on Steel but lets put a none reflective coating over it incase camouflage ever fails."

"Green and grey?" Senti thought out loud. "Hmm appropriate. Every Mandalorian that sees that color scheme will be cautious not to get on you bad side," she was quick to notice hidden meaning behind the colors.

[Codex/Technology Entry Beskar'gam: Mandalorian armor an element strongly linked to Mandalorian culture. Forged from the near indestructible metal known as Beskar (Mandalorian Iron). The value of a single suit can vary from 30,000 credits to the unprecedented millions depending on the manufacturer and quality of the product being sold. Mandalorian warriors would decorated their armor to reflect personal accomplishments, clan affiliation, or simply personal preference. They often repainted their armor to represent rank, clan, or to compliment current terrain. Armor is sometimes painted in the traditional colors that represented specific causes an individual might be undertaking. The color doesn't always have a

specific meaning though sometimes they were just colors that a particular Mandalorian might like. Though many colors still hold there meanings today. For instance a Mandalorian who painted their armor grey for instance could be mourning the loss of a lover, or another example would be a Mandalorian in black beskar'gam which could mean a dedication to Justice.

Common Color Scheme Meanings:

>Grey: Mourning a Lost Love
Red: Honoring a Parent

>Black: Dedication to Justice
Gold: A Desire for Vengeance

>Green: An Undying Duty
Blue: True Blue Reliability

>Orange: A Lust for Life]<p>

"I thought you would approach." A door bell chimed and Charles looked to the recomposed synthetic for answers, "Commander Shepard?"

Sentinel nods, "Alright, show 'em in and could you do me a favor and forward these plans to our MARS branch on Noveria for construction."

"Done," she said with a snap of the finger as Ripa and the others walked in. "Estimative time for construction to be finished in twenty-six galactic standard hours."

"Thanks," he said before turning from the AI to greet his guests. Giving a Mandalorian style handshake for Ripa and gentler ones for the girls. "Commander Shepard, Miss 'Zorah, Chief Williams welcome. Ripa thanks again for the favor. I know that this time of the year things tend to get very hectic for you so thank you for putting aside the time from you busy schedule to help out."

"Not at all Noble One my life and that of my Brothers is still yours," Ripa said with a bow before taking his leave.

As soon office door resealed Ashley spoke first, "Over dramatic much?"

"Please forgive Ripa if he talked your ear off," the SPARTAN shook his head in amusement. "Sangheili take life debts very seriously and Ripa is a very passionate Ascetic. So much so that he tend to embellish things."

"So you didn't shield Lady Sika from a live belt of thermal detonators?" Shepard mused.

"â€|."

"Or, single handedly take out an All Terrain Armored Heavy Transport to protect Ripa and his squad," Ashley added.

"That one is only half true. I had Third Fleet's Blue Team Tau 5 to back me up against that AT-AHT," the SPARTAN II cut them off before they went on a roll.

"But they only provided covering fire," Tali finished with Ashley and Shepard faces registering only confusion.

"And thank you again Rael," Charles muttered before sighing in

defeat. "All right so the Sith-Imperial War was full of many dramatic events that I played a part in."

"Ah-huh?" the three said in near harmony 009's attempts to downplay the past had failed crushingly.

"So then, if you will direct your attention to the holo-tank," Charles said eagerly for a chance out of the spotlight. "Feel free to take up a seat and get comfortable."

Tali was quick to snatch one of the recliners for her legs while the two marines took their time getting situated. The Commander still wore a half contained smirk as Ripa's epics still echoed in her mind while Ash now wore a look of professional disinterest.

The words 'Mandalorian Intelligence Network' soon rose from a floor-holo in bold strikingly clean san serif typography (Helvetica Neue UltraLight) before them. "Senti bring up the latest intel gathered on Matriarch Benezia and her most resent sighting," Charles spoke clearly.

"Recovering tier one case file dubbed 'Grim Friends,'" Sentinel read off the last bit smiling with the few contained giggles in the background while Charles shook his head at the title unamused.

"I see the analysts are getting creative with naming cases again," he mumbled.

"At approximately 6 GS (Galactic Standard) hours ago, Lady Benezia was last seen disembarking from her personal shuttle at the Noveria space port. The official registrar 'recovered' by MIN states that the Matriarch had arrived on business as per request of our primary target Saren Arterius. She was sent to oversee the finalization of a new product he had in development on Peak 15. Unfortunately since Peak 15's data network is isolated we have no new relevant data available on it's objectives," Sentinel paused for a moment for any question before continuing.

"Although we cannot identified the primary purpose of the facility. MIN analyst assessments of the supplies on shipping manifests for Peak 15 suggest the possibility of either a cloning program or the development of a biological weapon of some kind."

"I'm going to go with biological weapon Senti," Charles cut in.

"What makes you say that," Tali asked.

"Our enemy has a legion of Synthetics backing him. A biological weapon would pose no danger to his troops while it can very well incapacitate our own," Charles then waved Senti to continue.

"Matriarch Benezia was last seen being accompanied by an Asari Commando escort and had in her possession a large number of supply crates brought with her to Peak 15. Unfortunately because of her senior executive privileges the containers were only scanned briefly for organic life and a more thorough search was denied."

"Impressive you've been busy Mandalore," the Commander spoke up as

the presentation ended.

"Were not done yet Commander," Sentinel spoke as a link to MARS Industries appeared. "Now It's time to shop till we drop."

Charles just shook his head, "I took the liberty of making up a list of the surplus items from our Spec-Ops collection including Tier Zero equipment."

"Thank you, but I don't think I can afford any of this on my salary," Shepard said as she ran her eyes down the list.

"Senti please remove the price tags from view." Turning his head toward his guests in a charming manner he spoke, "Ladies dinner is on me Tonight."

The sound of the holo running was the only thing audible as the trio just gaped at the man encase in 200,000 year old armor before them completely speechless.

"What!" Ashley's voice cracked a sharp high C. "All of this is on you?" Charles nodded.

"We couldn't possibly accept such a donation," Shepard spoke with her jaw still in her lap.

"Why not?" Sentinel asked.

"Because couldn't he get in trouble our something," Shepard continued while Tali nodded in agreement rapidly still very much speechless.

"The company, the warehouses and everything inside 'em belongs to me." The SPARTAN spoke dryly, "I'm the owner and founder of MARS. I can donate my product to whatever charity I see fit."

"One of the quirks of being the sole proprietor of MARS Industries," Sentinel mused as she secretly took photo of trio's dumbstruck faces that she filed under 'priceless.'

"I don't know," was Shepard's response.

"Commonwealth Tier 0 Assets are sponsored and backed financially by our Governments." Charles spoke seriously, "That's actual the major different between the Spectres and organizations like the MINSAD-6, the SAR (Secret Acumen Rite or Sangheilian Service), the FIG-7 (Final Inquiry Group 7, Figment, or Jiralhanae Intelligence), U-SOB (Unggoy Special Operations Bureau), and the 151. Personally I think the fact you lot have to buy your own weapons and armor is counterproductive but who am I to judge."

"And since this is a joint Citadel and Commonwealth operation you will have access to the resources that Special Forces of our various branches would normally have at their disposal. Particularly those available to the agents of MIN and the 151," the AI finished where the SPARTAN left off.

"All rightâ€¦. Well what would you recommend," the human Spectre conceded.

"Well, I'd recommend our latest M8Ks, DMRs, some of our M77 Tactical Shotguns, on top of our M06 Sniper Rifles, and M8Ss. A dozen of each would be a practical amount." Charles looked towards an uncomfortable N7 who looked unsure about the charity, "So we have extras."

_ [Codex/Technology Entry_ MARS Industries Spec Ops Weapons Line:

>_ {MARS-A8K Carbine (or M8K): Is the modern railgun variant of the old UNSC MA5K Carbine. Rugged, reliable, and capable of being personalized down to the sensitivity of the trigger. The M8K quickly became the rifle of choice of the Mandalorian Marine Specialists in 113 ABY, and later the same with the Army and Navy in 114 ABY. The incase of extreme EMP exposure the M8K's MRM carries a standard Sixty round load of 8.23x51mm Armor-Piercing rounds incase of extreme EMP exposure.}
_ {MARS-557K Designated Marksman Rifle (DMR): A long lost descendent of the classic M395 DMR. The DMR was reborn at the request of Spec-Ops marksmen. Who required a weapon capable of clearing out a room thoroughly and cleanly while being able to take the head of an Imperial at 300 yards easy. Customizable and compact at 34.8 inches. The new DMR commonly sports a sniper scope and a 16 round MRM of 12.7x99mm Armor-Piercing.}
_ {MARS-114 Heavy Barrel Service Rifle (M114, Battle Rifle or BR): Descending from the UNSC BR55 line. The M114 entered into production in 108 ABY and quickly became the standard-issue rifle of the United Provinces of Mandalore Armed Forces. Adaptable and reliable the BR is a selective fire firearm capable of alternating from semi-automatic to burst fire to full auto. Prior to the introduction of the MRM the clip held a 36 round load of 8.23x51mm Armor-Piercing. Nearly three decades latter it is still the weapon of choice of the UPMAF.}
_ {MARS-77 Tactical Shotguns (M77): The evil step-son of the M45 Tactical Shotgun. It earned the nickname 'Saber-killer' in the hands marines who had close encounters with darksiders during the Sith-Imperial War. The M77 carries a load of twelve high explosive buckshot shells and a recoil stock for accuracies.}
_ {M06 Sniper Rifle Anti-MatÃ©riel System (M06): The forgotten kin of the SRS99-S5 AM. During the Sith-Imperial War Stormtroopers grew to fear the M06. So much so that the only thing capable of removing them from cover was the weapon itself. Equipped with a sophisticated thermal imaging system for 3,000 yard viewing. The M06 is capable of revealing targets hidden behind cover and removing them with it's 18.5x114mm Anti-armor round with little effort. Carrying a standard load of four rounds per MRM.}
_ {M8C/SOCOM (M8S): the cute little sister of the old M6C/SOCOM. The M8C/SOCOM has more bite in her than any one dare challenge, carrying a twelve round load of 13.7x40mm Armor-Piercing rounds.}]

"I guess, I can't argue with that logicâ€¦."

"Commander should I put an order in for our latest line of High Explosive Incendiary Rounds," Senti asked as she simultaneously start putting in the orders.

"How effective are they in combat?"

"They tear through Kinetic barriers like a hot knife through soft butter." Charles spoke with a hint of pride in his ingenuity, "Though it takes a little more concentrated fire to penetrate the energy shields built into our civilian sector models."

"Shepard maybe we should also to put an order in for TTRs (tranquilizer rounds)," the SPARTAN added.

"For taking Saren alive?"

"Or crowd control either way it can never hurt to have a non-lethal approach."

Another link came up with MARS's armor line, "As you can see MARS Industries makes armor for a multiple species that won't inhibit biotics or movement. Unfortunately we do not have a Black-Ops line compatible with turians or krogan physiology at his time. Though we should be able to make a special order if Officer Vakarian and Urdnot Wrex submit the necessary bio scans to compose something practical for them," Senti finished.

"Can I get something similar to my suits original color scheme?" Tali asked as she pointed at the image of a standard Assault Recon Marine armor that caught her eye. She sounded almost ashamed of her self for making such a request, "With a hint more violet in it if you would?"

"Sure I don't see why not. What about the rest of you?" Charles nods lightly before turning to the Alliance marines.

Shepard shrugs, "I'll take the 151's Recon variant. Paint it like my N7 armor if you can."

"Williams?" 009 asked.

"Your Heavy Assault armor looks like it can take a beating, standard urban camo for me," she finished.

After the last request the light of a scanner begins to fill the room recording the girls exact measurements. "Thank you for choosing MARS Industries," The SPARTAN jested, "please have a pleasant day."

Tali and Senti laughed a little while the other two just shook their heads at the bad joke. "Well the order has been sent to our Noveria branch and should be ready for pick up along with your Mark XIII Mandalore," the AI finished.

"Mark Thirteen?" Tali stopped and look to Charles with a curiosity.

"Just a replacement for this old Mark VII," the Two gestured to the armor he was wearing before speaking with the Commander. "Shall we head off to the Normandy or is there something else you need?"

"How did you know about the Normandy?" Shepard asked a little bit surprised at how well informed the SPARTAN was.

"Udinaâ€|he seemed quiteâ€|." The mandalore paused for a second to find the right words, "Pleased with my assistance."

"Sure he was," Shepard shook her head with a smile. "So what's the quickest way to the Normandy."

The Mandalore turns back and places his hand on the holo-tank to download the synthetic adolescent into the Mark Seven for one last

ride before the trade up, "My ship is docked below in the hanger."

"Ah the feel of mobility. You'd never realize it but it gets pretty boring in there playing Galaxy of Fantasy all the time," Senti spoke from the seven's speakers to the girls surprise.

"You want to take a ship?" Ashley spoke up as they followed him out the door to the lifts.

"Citadel traffic around this hour is murder it'd be faster if we take my ship," he said as the lift doors closed. "The hanger bay next to yours should still be vacant. It will take all of five minutes compared to the forty-five behind the rush-hour"

"So how many levels down is it?" Tali ask before mentally kicking herself when she noticed the counter reading eighty-three as the SPARTAN pressed the Zero to descend. "Oh, never mind."

The read dropped rapidly till a ping was herd and the door opened again with a hiss. "Talk about quality. That was by far the fastest elevator ride we've had all day," Williams sounded relieved as they entered a private hanger of a T-class Star Courier Transport all by its lonesome.

It clearly had a new coat of wax on it. There wasn't even a speck of dust on it to be accounted for. A few impressed whistles hung in the air before the SPARTAN spoke. "Dis 'ere is meh baby. I restored and upgraded her from the ground up from when she was just a forgotten bucket of bolts in a scrap yards on Naboo."

He was still walking with the three in hot pursuit as he went up the ramp and waited for them to catch up with him in the center of the circular hold before waving them over to the lift to their left. A second in and another out into the circular upper deck. Two parallel skylights lined the arched roof while six passenger seats filled the left and back wall with a spacious cockpit in the front.

Taking their seats the Mandalore made for the cockpit. Tali couldn't help but admire the craftsmanship as she looked around. While the others gave their own nods of approval for the "nice" ride. The SPARTAN's hands movements were fluid and incomprehensibly swift as they ran along the instruments of the helm to started up the ships drive core in a matter of seconds.

"What's her name?" Tali asked out of reflex as the not so subtle purr of a X-C2 ion drive grabbed the attention of the newly christened passengers for a moment.

"Damnâ€¦." Ashley was clearly impressed, "You think Joker might get jealous Commander?"

"Remember how he reacted to the Ascension," Elizabeth reminded.

"The registrar said the "Scimitar," but I decided on something with a little more creativity after wiping it clean," he paused as he pulled out then smoothly accelerate towards the C-sec hangars. "I ended up deciding on the 'Familiar Whisper.'"

"Why did you choose that?" Tali inner engineer couldn't resist.

"I have authorization and I'm dropping off a Council Spectre," he started arguing with Citadel Control. "The Whisper will be in and out in no time. Besides I checked the registrar already the bay will be unoccupied for the next seven months. One second Tali."

"Ah you got to love the not so subtle flaws of bureaucracy," Ashley joked as the debate with citadel control in the cockpit persisted.

"Yes, thank you Detective Chellick for your help. I hope you enjoy Mandalore and Corellia's finest." There was laugh and then the sound of docking claps finding their place, "All right thanks again. Tell the Misses I said hi."

Whirling around in his chair to get out after grabbing a duffle bag out of a nearest locker he turned to Tali. "This was and still is a stealth-ship and with the recent upgrades the only thing detectable is the faint whisper of her engines."

A minute later the urge to whistle was unbearable as Charles ran his eyes down the sleek design of the SSV Normandy. "Saying she's a beaut would be an understatement," he spoke out loud as he joined the others talking with Anderson and Udina.

"The Normandy is state of the art mix of human and turian ingenuity," Shepard replied while Sentinel quietly signaled the autopilot of the Familiar Whisper's to return to their private hanger.

"As I was saying Commander," Udina cut in to reaffirm his authority. "We had reports of geth in the Feros system shortly before our colony there dropped out of contact - and there have been sightings around Noveria as I'm sure the Mandalore has informed you."

"Find out what Saren was after on Feros and Noveria. Maybe you can figure out where the Conduit is before he does," Anderson spoke up.

"Wait another colony has gone darkâ€|? I don't understand why haven't any ships been sent to investigate?" The mandalore was surprised to say the least.

"Our fleets movements are restricted by the treaties agreements we signed with the council." Anderson said with irritation, "we're still requesting permission to send a ship."

"Maybe I can help?" the SPARTAN offered.

"How?" Udina cut in.

"Well, a hypothetical Stealth-frigate investigating a possible Death Watch sighting could stumble upon an in need Feros and decided to provide aid out of the goodness of their hearts," the Mandalore hinted. "Of course this is all hypothetical."

"That could buy us the time needed to pickup our supplies and then provide Feros with our undivided attention," Shepard was clearly grateful. "Thank you."

The SPARTAN held his hand up while the other was pressing his comm

closer to his ear, before nodding. "Done," he said while looking back down towards the group. "I'm ready to go when you are Commander."

"Wait, we have one more lead on Matriarch Benezia. She has a daughter, a scientist who specializes in the Protheans," Udina suggested. "We don't know if she is involved but it might be a good idea to find her, and see what knows."

"Her name is Dr. Liara T'Soni. She is on archeological dig on the planet Therum in the Artemis Tau cluster," Charles added. "Although she is a 106 years old she is a very powerful biotic, so some caution is recommended."

"Whichever you choose is your decision to make Commander." Charles couldn't help but smirk at how much Anderson sounded like parent, "You're a Spectre now you don't answer to us."

"But your actions still reflect on humanity as a whole," Udina the bad parent. "You make a mess and I get stuck cleaning it up."

"I'll try not to make things any harder on you Ambassador," and Shepard being the good child.

"Glad to hear it, Commander. Remember you were a human long before you were a Spectre," 'and people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones' Sierra-009 observed the ambassador with a god complex.

"I have a meeting to get to. The Mandalore or Captain Anderson can answer any questions you might have," Udina finished before heading for his meeting.

Shepard waited for the elevator door to close before speaking, "How are you holding up Captain?"

"Honestly?" Anderson shook his head and shrugs in disappointment, "This isn't how I picture my career coming to an end. Pushing papers really isn't my thing."

"But your the one who can stop Saren." The former N7 recomposed himself with a military stance, "I believe in you Shepard if that means I have to step aside, so be it."

"Thank you, I won't let you down Sir." Shepard said with a salute before heading towards the Normandy with Tali and Ashley in tow before tuning around, "Coming Mandalore?"

"In a minute. I just need to run something by Anderson," he said waving them to go a head till they disappeared behind the airlock.

"What is it Charles?" The former N7 questioned the SPARTAN.

"David you want me to pull some strings." The mandalore began as Anderson began to wave off the idea, "Hackett can help he owes us both favors maybe he can get you back into a captain's chair."

"I'm needed here."

"And more so out there," Charles pointed to the unknown horizon beyond the hanger. "If the Reapers arrive, the Alliance is going to need every seasoned captain available to fend 'em off."

"So you think they're really out there?" Anderson was surprised.

"I've had less than a day to do any proper research. But I recall a forerunner archive referring to a third faction that existed long before both the Forerunners during the Golden Age of the Precursors," Charles took a breath. "I can't remember the exact detailsâ€¦but Shepard's description of the synthetics was eerily familiar to a recorded machine race labeled as Harvesters."

"All right I'll call Hackett and tell him we're cashing in." The Captain was all business now, "In the meantime I suggest you help the Commander in anyway you can and continue looking into the Reapers."

"Agreed good luck David," the Mandalore took the N7's hand.

"Stay frosty Charles," he replied with a grin, before they went their separate ways.

"Now it is time for us to step up and do our part for the rest of the galaxy! Time to show them what humans are made of!" Shepard's voice was echoing charisma and direction as the SPARTAN left the airlock and was now watching the Normandy's new CO give her rallying speech.

"Our enemy knows we're coming." She continued to inspire, "When we go into the Traverse Saren's followers will be waiting for us. But we'll be ready for them, too."

"Humanity needs to do this, not just for our own sake, but for the sake of every other species in known space. Saren must be stopped, and I promise you allâ€¦we will stop him!"

"Well said Commander, Captain would be proud," the ships pilot spoke from his chair hidden from the SPARTANS line of sight.

"The captain gave up everything so I could have a chance." She declared, and nearly jump when she noticed the SPARTAN leaning on one of the ships braces, "We can't failâ€¦"

"Yes, sir!" the pilot spoke up, clearly unaware of the Mandalore's presence.

"Nice speech," the SPARTAN spoke as he got off the brace and slung his duffle over his shoulder. "Where do you need meh?"

"You can set up shop in the garage on engineering," Shepard began as she lead them past a CIC to a stairwell on their right down to an elevator. "You'll be bunking down there with Wrex since neither of you can fit in the sleeping pod. I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all, sounds like a resort accommodation in my book," the Two's memory flashed back to his childhood on Reach.

"Really?" she said as the doors opened revealing a Turian working on

a what only the Alliance could call a tank, a Krogan Battle-master standing around idly waiting for the next fight, and Chief Williams displaying a level of Alliance discipline rarely seen as she methodically disassembled, cleaned, and reassembled each of her weapons.

"I practically grew up in a foxhole," the SPARTAN half joke as he struggled for a moment to remember life before the orphanage and the UNSC.

"Interesting no wonder you fit in with the Mandalorians," Shepard was obviously trying to establish a read.

"Yes and no," the SPARTAN said as he carefully leaned on the requisitions table behind him unsure if it will hold his weight before crossing his arms and explaining. "Traditional Mandalorians never have had to pay the price of being taken away from their family to become soldiers."

"I'm sorry I meant no offense." She was a little surprised.

"Oh no, I'm not offended Iâ€¦.I um Okay I'm sorry I guess I worded that wrongâ€¦." The SPARTAN started to rethink his choice of words, "Look umâ€¦in some ways yes the military aspect and the discipline that is pivotal to our culture tends to make me feel right at home. But there are somethings that I never got to really appreciate growing up compared to most mandos."

"Like your family?" Shepard asked.

"Exactly. I can't help but wonder what my life could have been if it never happened," as his thoughts drifted to a certain fews days after his forth birthday. The sirens of emergency services echoing as he felt those horrid flames on his back again.

"So did you lose your family in the war?" Shepard wore a look of concern as her eyes were trying to read his own hidden ones.

"Close, but no. Terrorist bombing. I ended up in an orphanage for a couple years before the UNSC well more specifically my Godmother whisked me a way."

"I'm sorry. I can't imagine what your going through but if you want to talk?" She was sincere the building tears in her eyes made that obvious to the SPARTAN.

Touched 009 smiled a little before speaking, "Thanks, but I got rid of those demons a long time ago." He took a deep breath, "Lets just say I got my vengeance before the Great War." She wore a look of doubt, "Honestly I'm good I might drift back and remember a bit but the future always has a place in my mind."

"So you have fond memories of your family?" she was redirecting now to see if he was being honest.

"Yeahâ€¦. I remember my Father's cheering. Well, more like wailing his head off every time his team scored a goal. While meh Mum always joked with me during these "CUP" events not to be come such bloody fan like meh Dad because I'd scare away all the pretty girls," He chuckled as he managed to reconstruct his mothers face from

memory.

"Cup events?" Shepard was curious.

"I can't remember exactly I wasn't even four yet. I think it had something to do with a championship for some kind for a sport," Charles was drawing a blank. "Senti do ya have anything in your memory banks about ancient human sports?"

"Could you mean the Galactic Cup perhaps for Gravball?" The AI questioned.

"Hmmâ€¦.maybe I just know it was a big deal to me father because of our ancestry," the SPARTAN spoke. "Something about my parents not being from Tribute and being proud of our highland heritage."

"Well that explains your slight accent," Senti spoke up. "Personally I'm surprised it never occurred to me before."

"I have an accent?" the SPARTAN spoke a bit surprised.

"To be honest I figured it was because were a Mandalorian," Shepard spoke up, clearly amused at the direction the conversation took. "Do you remember anything else?"

"Well, one other memory stands out." His thoughts drifted back to the smell of antiseptic and wails coming from a bundle in his arms. "I remember my sister's birth her name wasâ€¦wasâ€¦something with an Aâ€¦.Abby? Noâ€¦that was her nickname. Abigail? Yes Abigail."

"You had a sister?" Shepard was surprised.

"Yeah I used to call her Stinky," Charles chuckled Shepard rolled her eyes. "Me mum didn't much care for that either. My sis had fiery full head of red hair when she was born like me Mum but brown eyes like Dad."

"What did you get?" Shepard continue unraveling the mystery in front of her.

"Mum's eyes and Dad's Hair though now there are hints of gray in the later," the SPARTAN didn't bite.

"Nice try," Sentinel cut in. "He doesn't tend to give that info away right off the bat, it's aâ€¦."

"SPARTAN II thing. Yeah Thel'Vadum already told me," she laughed a little. "I got to put our heading in. Talk later?"

"Sure, mind if I have a wee look of the Normandy." Charles gestured to the rest of the ship

"Feel free," she was halfway in elevator now before looking back. "Later."

Looking around at his new surroundings he couldn't help but begin to inspect the stealth craft and give it a full check up before going over to the Mako.

"Something I can help you with Mandalore?" the Turian spoke up from

the tire he was patching up.

"I can't help but notice that this Mako has some potential," the SPARTAN began as he got down on all fours to get a look at the suspension. "She just need some tender love and care to build up her self-esteem."

"You think?" Garrus said as he came to Charles's level to get a look at what 009 was inspecting.

"I'm sure a couple weapon specialists like us can figure it out," standing up again he offers the Turian a hand up. "First thing I think we should do is give her some new teeth."

"How do you propose we do that?" His mandibles fluttered with curiosity before accepting the Mandalorian's hand.

"Well, we have a day and half before we reach Noveria. In that time we can go over the toys that MARS branch has in stock." Turning back and speaking loudly to grab the chief and krogan's attention, "Though were going to need some help putting it together before Feros, what do you guys say want to make a big boom?"

"What this about a big boom?" Wrex walked over from his spot with Williams trailing a few steps behind.

"We're thinking about making a few improvements to the Mako," Garrus spoke up clearly excited about the idea.

"What kind of improvements," Ashley ask.

"Well for starters, I was thinking we up the ante and add a bigger gun," the SPARTAN began. "A real ground pounder."

"Now your talking!" Wrex declared with chuckle, "I'm in."

"Eh? Why not, better than cleaning rifles all day," Ashley chimed in.

"Good feel free to spread the word the more help the better," SPARTAN pulled out a holopad and Sentinel's image soon appeared. The remote controlled holo revealing her likeness began to float about the deck. "I'm going to see if I can find some extra hands. Senti could you be a dear and show 'em what our Noveria branch has in stock."

"Sure while I'm at it should I scan Officer Vakarian and Urdnot Wrex so we can make a special orders for them as well?" Senti said causing some confusion between the two.

"Fill 'em if would ya? After my first stop I'm going to collect the Lieutenant so he can pick out a model for himself as well," and with that the SPARTAN made for engineering to deliver the word.

"Attention Ladies and Gentlemen a moment of your time if ya please," his voice rumbled startling a few engineers to his presence. "We're giving the Mako a total overhaul before we reach Feros. So if your interested in getting your hands dirty feel free to jump in during your free time we could definitely use the help."

Tali who had just finished typing at a terminal as the Mandalore stepped in was now eager to do something as the few murmuring engineers were nodding to each other in approval.

"Adams I'm done here mind if I take a quick break to help the others," the Quarian spoke out.

"You finished calibrating the FBA arrays already?" The Chief Engineer was clearly impressed, "All right go ahead, I think we can survive without your technical prowess for a few minutes Miss 'Zorah."

Tali stepped up to the SPARTAN a little more confident now than before but still a tad bit shy as she spoke, "Soâ€¦um what can I do to help?"

"Well for right now Senti is probably still filling out an order for new armor for Garrus and Wrex," Charles said as they left engineering only to have his theory confirmed.

"So in the mean time you and I Miss 'Zorah can go rally the others to our noble cause," he joked a little as she followed him into the elevator with a giggle.

"Please if you don't mind Mandalore just call me Tali," she said with an invisible blush that surprisingly didn't register on the SPARTAN radar.

"Sure I don't see why not," the SPARTAN said in a supportive tone. "Your father never was a fan of formalities either. You can call me Charles if you want?"

"What!" Tali's hand hit the elevators emergency stop her voice almost sounded delirious, "Your name is Charles?"

"Yes," he said with an amused nod, 'Is she catching on lets see?'

"And your friends with my father?" Another nod from the SPARTAN.

"So he knows you name as well?" Another nod yet again.

"We've known each other for almost seventeen years now."

"So you must have trained him during the early days of ARM?"

"Yes, I was a founding instructors. Did you get that bracelet I sent to ya for your pilgrimage?"

"Uncle Charlie?" Tali was on the verge of tears now.

"Yes," if Charles wasn't a Two her tackle that turned into a sobbing hug would have drilled him into the wall. "You sure grew since the last time I saw ya."

"But, why now? It's been seven years?" Charles couldn't help but laugh as a wave of guilt washed over.

"Because their has been a growing number of assassination attempts against me over the past decade and I didn't want you and the others getting caught in the middle of it."

"Why tell me now?" She whimpered.

"We decided to tell you who I really was after your pilgrimage." He paused to collect his thoughts, "but considering our current situation I figured now would be better than later."

"We?"

Charles took a knee so they would be at eye level. She was staring at him intently as if she was little again, "I'm sorry it was mainly my own idea. With the Sith gunning for me and anyone associated with me. I'd sooner wrestle a Rancor than risk you or anyone else's safety."

"Uncle your stronger than a Rancor," She stated the obvious. "Dad told me about time yoâ€¦."

"Tal," using the nickname he gave her to make a point. "It's a figure of speech."

"So why didn't anybody tell me that you were the Mandalore?"

"Iâ€¦uhâ€¦. Well, honestly when I used to visit for some reason the subject never came up. So when the Sithâ€¦Imperial War broke out and Krayt's assassins were always visiting the less you knew about me the better."

"So you were protecting me?"

"Exactly," he said while ruffling her hijab for old times sake much to her annoyance.

4. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Things seemed to be going as planned in Charles's mind as he watched the majority of the Normandy's crew come together in the garage in the past five hours to make their contribution to the M35. The Mark VII's onboard chronometer now read a little more than three hours since yesterday had ended and still there were plans being made around the holographic scans Sentinel provided of the mako. Second thoughts about race had been evaporating slowly in the past five hour as the SPARTAN watched people who he had sensed tension between before find common ground in the universal interest of things that go BOOM!

"They're still going at it?" Charles's eyes followed the sound of the voice and located the newly appointed Spectre in what he assumed were her after-hour fatigues gazing up at the timeworn commando reclining against the wall on the opposite side of engineering.

"There were a few amusing tales told during breaks but mostly they've been going at it this whole time," he said matter of factly as his eyes fell upon the N7 insignia standing out on her Alliance gray tang top and the blood red stripe running down the right side of her leisurewear bottoms.

The Two's gaze trailed back over to the group of specialists debating on the options for suspension. "Do you have time to talk again?" she said abruptly catching the SPARTAN off guard. Something bothering her that much was certain as she indicated towards the lift with her thumb.

Charles looked over towards the group again. Tali was now on receiving end of being praised by the others about some new targeting system she had just thrown together. An surprisingly enough it was Chief Williams was being the most vocal. Satisfied he nodded before following Shepard to the elevator.

They ended up in the now empty mess behind the lift. The Commander had taken a seat before gesturing for him to join her. Looking down at the frail chair he shook his head before leaning back against one of the ship's pillars, "Thanks but I'll stand."

She looked at the chair then up to him and a warm smile of understanding formed as she brushed a gold bang from her sapphire eyes to get to the point. "Have you received any word yet on Feros?"

He nodded before switching to an all business tone. "They just made contact with the colony over half an hour ago. After we make our supply run at Noveria I'd suggest we aid Feros ASAP."

"What's happening?" The N7's face was nearly unreadable.

"I had assigned a 151 stealth frigate the Loveless Skulker to investigate. They encountered a small Geth convoy orbiting the planet. The Skulker had caught 'em off guard and eliminated all of the hostiles in orbit." He paused for a moment, "Unfortunately the Geth had already bunkered down pretty deep in a grounded Frigate. With the latest orbital scan the number of unfriendly boots on the ground is at least battalion strength."

Shepard whistled, "I'm guessing the area is too unstable for an orbital bombardment or they would have done so already."

"Exactly. With the civvies in the kill radius of the geth frigate the colony is too danger close to bring down the rain," the SPARTAN spoke. "The Skulker has already deployed their fire teams ground side but they only have a small platoon of 151 specialists."

"So they are caught in a rock and a hard place. Either protect the civilians or engage the threat."

"Correct. Though there is a silver lining recon suggest that all commands are being transmitted from that single Geth Frigate," Charles finished.

"All right. So while your people protect the civilians we send a small infiltration team to disable the Frigate," Shepard spoke calmly as she stared down at her joined hands on the table.

"Something else on your mind Commander," the SPARTAN sensed the a debate over asking whatever question was ruling the N7's thoughts.

"Am I that easy to read," she spoke looking into the glowing pair piercing the visor.

"No not really," he yawned a little. "Excuse me. When you spend most of your life with people who wear armor constantly the simple gestures and movements tend to read as subtly as a fireworks display."

"Ohâ€|okay. Well, what were you talking to the Captain about," she asked.

"The reapers and getting him a new ship," Charles said simply.

"You have influence in the Systems Alliance?" she seemed rather surprised.

"We both have higher ups that owe us some favors after the 141 incident," the SPARTAN spoke vaguely. "Anderson is a good man and Captain when the Reapers attack I think it would be best if we had him behind a ship instead of a desk."

"So you think the Reaper threat is real then?"

"There are some forerunner archives that give reference to a bio-synthetic race of Harvesters that match your description and the images of the unknown ship on Eden Prime," Shepard's jaw practically unhinged itself with the SPARTANS little tidbit of information.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah apparently they tried harvesting my galaxy during the time of the Precursors. They were beaten back but not at the cost of most of the Precursor's military strength," he paused for a moment. "That was a well over 600,000 years agoâ€|. It is possible that after their defeat the Reapers decided to cut their substantial losses and focus their goals on other galaxies such as yours."

"If they're so powerful why do they need Saren?" Shepard was struggling to comprehend what had just been shared with her.

"Well, the archive hints that well over half their armada was destroyed by the Precursors superior tactics and technology with the aid of Forerunners ground forces. So maybe they decided to change from the brute force tactic of relying on sheer numbers to something far more complex and strategic," Charles brought his hand to the chin of his helmet deep in thought.

"How do we even know if these are the same races," the Commander asked. "What if the Reapers are something completely different."

"Well we will need proof of course. An even if I am wrong doesn't change the fact that a race superior to the Protheans wiped 'em out without leaving any trace of their existence," the SPARTAN pointed out. "We need to be ready. Both of our Galaxies just in case."

"So how did the Commonwealth leadership react to this new threat," Shepard was definitely a curious one Sierra-009 had to give her that.

"They're concerned as I am," Charles closed his eyes giving in to their weight. "Recent activity with Krayt's Empire has made us even more vigilant than usual and with the Jedi High Council telling us that they've been sensing a great darkness in the future long before any of this even happenedâ€¦. It's hard to ignore the coincidences when the lives of billions rest on your shoulders Shepard."

He shook his head before opening his eyes to look into her own, "The timing is a little too close for comfort Commander. We just don't want to be caught with our pants down."

"What will the Commonwealth do?"

"Whatever it takes to protect as many lives as possible," the SPARTAN looked up and sighed as he noticed some of the crew walking by to get into their sleeping pods while the night shift took over. "Looks like they have the right idea. I'm going to go down and get some shut eye or is there something else?"

"One more thing," the N7 said with a yawn of her own. "You mentioned the 141 Incident."

"Yes."

"What do you know do you know of my fathers death?" she deadpanned

'Charlie-foxtrot,' Charles thought to himself "Commander that information is only going to cause you more grief than good trust me."

"Mandalore I need to know who killed himâ€¦please," she begged with tears brimming her eyes. "Anderson would never tell me anything and kept saying, 'Some truths are not meant for ears' or some other BS like that, please."

"How much do you already know about Task Force 141?"

"It was a Citadel, Commonwealth tier-0 joint special operations group consisting of the best of the best to combat the growing number of terrorist and pirate slaver attacks in this galaxy. My father Lieutenant General James C. Shepard was the CO of the group."

Charles couldn't speak as he ran the scenarios in his head if he educated the Commander on the events leading to her father's deathâ€¦.

"All right, then tell me who killed Lieutenant Simon Riley," Charles looked up to that name immediately.

"Howâ€¦?"

"Am I familiar with Simon?"

"More of what was your relation to Ghost?" Charles began to fumble through his webbing for a package Simon had entrusted to him to look after before his last OP.

"Weâ€¦we've had been dating for about two year before I found out

from Captain Price that that he had died with Sergeant Sanderson and Captain MacTavish" she looked down at the white knuckles her fists were clenched in rage.

"Hmâ€¦." Charles merely grunted as he move next to Shepard and placed a small leather box in front of her then placed a holo in her hand. "Last time I saw Ghost he asked me to deliver these to his "Squeeze" incase something went wrong. Unfortunately the knuckle head scampered off into the drop ship before I could get a name."

"He always did make a habit of over look the simplest things," she reminisced with a gentle smile before pressing 'play' and tossing the holo to the floor for the full resolution.

In mere moments a realistic sized image of a mandalorian in black beskar'gam with blue trim appeared before them with a white human skull painted on his helmet, "Roach is it playing?"

"Elek, ner vod (yes, my brother)." A voice came from the background that Charles hadn't heard in over five years.

"Hey Lizzyâ€¦. If your watching this then it means something went wrong. Either Deathwatch saw us coming and was ready for us or something else happened." He sighs before revealing his cleanly shaven face. His eyes were as black as his hair, while his face was reasonably tanned from some well spent times in the sun.

"I know how you like to be traditional so I decided to make a compromise between our two cultures," the image got down on his knee before her, Shepard instinctively brought her hand up to her mouth in disbelief. "This is the best I can do now. Elizabeth since I no longer have hands could you open the little red leather box for me."

She laughed with tears in her eyes and nearly choked on them as she saw a golden ring with a square cut diamond half as big as an acorn resting in its setting. There was a whistle in the background followed up with, "lucky girl!"

"Gary!..." Simon emphasized to Roach to be quiet, before by some miracle looked directly in to her eyes. "Elizabeth Anne Shepard will you marry me?"

"Yes!" she cried out without even thinking.

He shifts a little nervously on his knee, "Hopefully you said yes to that."

"Of course I would you idiot," she said wiping away her tears.

"Mhi solus tome, mhi solus dar'tome, mhi me'dinui an, mhi ba'juri verde (We are one whether we are together or apart, we will share everything and we will raise our children as warriors)," Simon recited the Mandalorian marriage contract by heart.

"Mhi solus tome, mhi solus dar'tome, mhi me'dinui an, mhi ba'juri verde," Elizabeth responded a little shakily to the vid of her lost love.

Seconds past before Ghost spoke again, "Then it's officialâ€¦."

Hopefully my gut is wrong and we get to do this in person." He laughs while scratching the back of his head at the possibility.

"Elizabethâ€¦promise me you will live your life to the fullest if the worst happens," he said with an oddly reassuring smile for her. "I could say something dramatic like avenge me but lets face it we're soldiers the possibility of ending up KIA is in the job description after allâ€¦. Charlesâ€¦um, Sir..." he looked down for a moment before returning his gaze to Liz. "Thank youâ€¦."

"Re'turcye mhi ner Cyar'ika. Ni kar'tayl gar darasuum." (Goodbye my Beloved. I love you.) Ghost spoke in a devoted tone before the image faded away.

"Simon," she coveted the ring now on her wedding finger afraid it might fade away forever if she let go.

"I'm truly sorry for your lost Ghostâ€¦Simon was a good noâ€¦a great man, a loyal friend, and truly one of the finest TGR Officers I've ever had the pleasure of serving with," he said as he moved over to place a hand on her shoulder for support.

"Charles is it?" she look up into the SPARTAN's visor. "Tell me who killed Simon."

"It doesn't matter I already put the man responsible for Ghost's and the other's deaths down personally," he deadpanned.

"I still need to know!" she roared as she got to feet to stare down the metal giant. "I'm a Council Spectre now! Tier 0 remember? You no longer have the authority to withhold that information from me!"

"Shepard if I do this it will bring you nothing more than heartache," he said sternly.

"SPARTAN, I need this. For five years it has haunted me, I need the truth," she finished.

He sighs in defeat before he gestured for her to retake her seat, "I'm sending ya father's and Simon's file to your quarter's terminalâ€¦."

"Thank yâ€¦." He put his hand up to finish.

"Don'tâ€¦please let me finish," she was quiet now as she looked up to the Titan. "Once we reach Noveria I'll take my leave with Tali and have someone equally qualified take our places."

"Whatâ€¦why I thought you said you killed the man responsible for their deaths," the confusion was evident on her face.

"I killed the man who shot Ghost and Roach pointblank and had their fellow 141s murdered."

"What about my father's killer?" She was struggling to connect the dots.

"I'm not committing suicide if that is what ya asking?" he said

without emotion.

Shepard nearly choked on air she was breathing,
"youâ€¦killed?"

Charles only give a nod as confirmation.

"Wâ€¦."

"Why?" He finished her question before answering, "Because he nearly started a war with the Batarian Hegemony and murdered my men. I trusted him with their lives, and I let him become the head of The One-Four-One. That made him my responsibility during final days of the 141 incidentâ€¦. He wouldn't come in and face the charges placed against him."

She stared in disbelief, "Your lyingâ€¦my father would neverâ€¦."

"He lost 30,000 men under his command at Akuze. During his hunt for Asadâ€¦he became bitter with the galaxy in the aftermath."

"He wouldn'tâ€¦."

"Ghost's greybox was shattered beyond repair but luckily Roach's remained intact even after your father had their bodies burned," he sighed. "We would have never even known the truth if Captains Price and MacTavish hadn't survived your father's attempt to clean shop."

"Iâ€¦I need some time to processes thisâ€¦," she shook while staring down at the ring Simon left for her.

"Commander."

With the simple goodbye the SPARTAN moved towards the elevator and taped the down arrow. A minute later he was at the bottom of the ship the krogan battlemaster had buried himself under an aged blanket for the night. The remote holo holding Senti was in sleep mode on a new charger port someone had taken the time to construct for her. Charles decided to take the corner to huddle in as he turned up the VII's internal thermostat a few degrees to get comfortable before he began to recite his Daily Remembrance.

"Ni su'cuyi, gar kyr'adyc, ni partayli, gar darasuum ("I'm still alive, but you are dead. I remember you, so you are eternal") Daisy, Rose, Linda, John, Leonardo, Cortana, Cal, Rtas, Thel, Fhajad, Ralph, Jorge, Kelly, Fred, Sam, Kurt, Carter, Kat, Jai, Joshua, Grace, Adriana, RenÃ©, Emile, Victor, Vinh, Tom, Lucy, Arthur, Solomon, Maria, Carris, Jun, Jonah, Roland, Mike, Li, Anton, Keiichi, Will, Malcolm, Joseph, Randall, Cassandra, Kirk, Isaac, Soren, Zuka, Roach, Soap, Ghost,â€¦Shepardâ€¦, Chief, Auntie Cat, Mum, Dad, Abby." The weathered soldier took a deep breath, before speaking in a paternal tone, "You should be in bed. It's late."

"I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt. I was running some last minute diagnostics on the Drive Core," Tali had emerged from the hall leading to the core yawning. "I-um."

"Is the something wrong Tal?" Charles said looking up to her from his

corner for the evening.

"I not really a fan of sleeping pods," she said sightly embarrassed. There was a mute chuckle from the Battlemaster laying across from him.

"There's a sleeping bag and pad in my duffle on the requisitions table if you want it," the SPARTAN pointed to the bag and herd another mute krogan chuckle.

"Finding something amusing Wrex?" Charles whispered as his niece was fishing through his things on the other side of the room.

"You Bucket, just you," Wrex laughed a little before his tone changed. "Are you really trying to cure my people?"

"Yes," the SPARTAN said with a smirk as he watched Rael's daughter struggle with the bag.

"Why?" Wrex asked emotionlessly.

"Because I know what it feels like to be denied the opportunity to be a father," Charles said coldly.

Wrex was quiet for a moment, "Even if you were to cure us you know there is a good chance that my people could start another war, right?"

"True but Commonwealth laws would prevent excessive breeding like the ones we place on a territories that are overpopulated. Sanghelios and Breshig for example," Charles answered.

"Like we're going to obey your laws," Wrex sounded a little annoyed at the SPARTANS idiocy.

"One of the prices of gaining Commonwealth citizenship is having to obey the universal laws put in place. Another would be taxes," the SPARTAN continued casually.

"What!" Wrex roared causing Tali to stumble as she approached the group. The Krogan was now staring eye to eye with the SPARTAN, "What did you mean by citizenship?"

"That is difficult to say since Tuchanka has no unified government. So integrating your people would be difficult. A few of the galactic leader like myself are debating on a solution to that," Charles said with a yawn clearly unaffected by the krogan's outburst.

"Your willing to offer us citizenship?" Wrex said in disbelief.

"Yes," Charles was clearly showing signs of fatigue as the confused Quarian watched the exchange between the two timeworn souls.

"All of us?"

"Anyone who is interested, yes." Charles stretched before the glow of his eyes disappeared.

Wrex just sat there staring at the sleeping titan while Tali began to

set up camp between the two. Confused the krogan returned to the warmth of his bed, with a snicker "Crazy bucket-head doesn't know what he's getting himself into."

"Yes I do. Now go to sleep," Charles muttered, as he shifted to a more comfortable position before dozing off.

July 24, 2552: Visegr d, Eposz, Reach

>"Listen up, Noble team." Carters voice came in clearly through my helmet's comm I could lightly hear the sound of the Falcon's twin turboprop engines roaring in the background thanks to the sound nullifiers in my helmet. I leaned over past Kat to get a look at the other bird carrying Noble Lead and my "apprentice."<p>

"We're looking at a downed relay outpost, fifty klicks from Visegrad.

>We're going to introduce ourselves to whoever took it out, then Kat's going to get it back online"<p>

"Just get me under the hood, Commander." The Lieutenant Commander to my right replied with a nod as I rechecked my SOCOM and classic MA5K before looking up to Jorge. I gave my fellow Two a nod to ask since ONI wouldn't let me give him a straight answer incase this operation was a false alarm.

So Jorge spoke up as I reclined back into my seat while Noble Four gives me an untrusting glance. "Sir, why would rebels want to cut off Reach from the rest of the colonies?"

"You get a chance, maybe you can ask them, Jorge." Was the commander responds. Clearly their handler Colonel Holland wasn't kept in the loop either. He is not the type to keep his people in the dark. Emile just shook his head satisfied to have his suspicions of me confirmed.

"Commander, we just lost our signal with HQ." Kat spoke up as I noticed my MJOLNIR Black's uplink go dead as well.

"Back channels?" Carter was reading my mind as I was already running a diagnostic on my armor.

"Searching...nada. Can't say what's jamming us." Kat's curiosity was clearly peaked as my understudy began requesting a private comm channel between us.

"You heard her. Dead zone confirmed. Command will not be keeping us company this trip." Carters voice echoed throughout the team's radio.

"I'm lonely already." Four spoke up as we felt our bird rise.

I sigh in defeat as I feel her staring at me to answer from the other Falcon before opening a private line between us. Her voice floods in immediately. "So what's going on Captain? Are we staying quiet or can we warn them?"

"We don't even know if they're here Rose. The analyst could have been misled." I didn't like withholding intel from Noble either but orders were orders, "We need more evidence before we declare WINTER CONTINGENCY."

"I know the rules Charles. But, I also know when it is the right time to break them. All thanks to you TEACH..." She giggled mischievously, "like last night for example."

My face suddenly reddened at that last bit as I couldn't help but wonder how I got myself in this predicament with the Beta SPARTAN III. It was about seven years ago when she had just been placed under my wing. Kurt was raving to me how he had found a candidate with the potential to surpass not only me and him but John as well. Little did I know that the fifteen year old redhead standing in front of me then would eventually blossom into a beautiful young woman.

"And the past three years before that," her voice was seductive now as I wondered how an out of the blue confession of love from such a quiet girl could turn her into strong and independent woman. Who had me wrapped around her fingers.

"Rose, we need to focus on the task at hand," I spoke with a playful authority, "the encore to last night will come after we get the job done."

"There's the communications outpost." Jorge spoke up as we looked down at the smoking ruin of a warthog.

"Reading a distress beacon," Kat cut in.

"Could be the missing troopers. Let's check it out." The SPARTAN Commander spoke, "Put us down on the bluff. Jun, I want your eyes in the sky."

"Sir," replied the Rifleman.

"Let's go. All right, Noble Team. Spread out. Watch the approach."

Rose and I were the first to the smoking ruin with Noble a mere half minute behind. We privately talked pointing out the possible signs of plasma scarring on the burning vehicle before us. While Kat and the others examined the beacon, I had a few grim theories to Jorge's question about the missing troops that I kept them to myself as the others debated.

"Smoke at the next structure, boss." Noble Two pointed out as we began to move out with Emile at point.

"Circle west and check it out," was the III's response. "Noble Team you have permission to engage, but be selective. We don't need to telegraph a presence."

As I followed Rose I couldn't help but wonder why Carter was calm about being the escort of a ONISAD. Most Threes outside of ONI hated us for very good reason.

"Noble Six move into the house."

"Going in quiet" Rose spoke as I continued to follow her checking corners while Four was ahead of doing recon.

"We're right behind you"

"Noble Leader, I'm seeing heat-sigs in the structure ahead!" Jun Noble Three reported we spot Emile not too far away pointing his shotgun in the face of a local farmer.

Immediately Rose puts herself between Four and the civilian as I come up next to Emile and forced the barrel down with my free hand. "We don't threaten civilians without probable cause," I growled at the Warrant Officer who shook the gun from my grip to stare me down as Jorge and the others came up from behind him.

"They're not rebels, they're farmers." My fellow Two spoke, "Look at them."

"Ask them what they are doing here," Carter cuts in to stay mission objective.

Five begins translating the Hungarian farmer's words to the team. "Mit kerestek itt?" (What are you doing here?)

"Csak nem akartunk meghalni." (We just didn't want to die.) Answered the Farmer. I had almost forgotten about Jorge's Hungarian dissent, we used to talk when we were little about ourselves and our homes before they became distant memories.

"Hiding, sir. Neighbors were attacked last night. He heard screams, gunfire. It stopped around sunrise." Listening to Jorge's translation, I remember when Dã©jã would teach us about Reach's history. How it was first colonized by many eastern Europeans which explained diversity of languages spoken on Reach.

"Valami megãlta a fiamat." (Something killed my son.) Jorge was lucky enough to grow up on his home planet, to be able to keep part of his heritage through the Hungarian he spoke. He was born in one of Reach's cities, Pãlhãzaã€I think.

"He says something in the fieldsã€killed his son."

"Something?" Carter verbalized my thoughts.

"Commander, be advised. I'm reading heat signatures at the structure directly east from your position. Over?" Our eye in the sky's radioed us again.

"Copy that. Get them back inside." A259 ordered my fellow II.

"Azt mondtam, befelã!" (I said get in! Get in!) Jorge bellowed.

"Noble team double time it," Carter ordered as we begin to move on the building at full sprint.

This time I went in first Rose at my six as we came across the scene of tortured army personnelã€the missing troopers. Getting on a knee I look at the fresh blood patterns on the ground and counted the digits of the foot print out of habit, "Three of 'emã€Dammit."

I sigh in frustration wishing it was a boot print instead then I look up to my left to acknowledge Rose's hand on my shoulder. I smile as I watch for a moment as her thumb gently tries to penetrate my armor

with a comforting stroke.

"Got something Sir?" Carter asked as he stood guard at the door leading to the next room

"Carter it's the WINTER CONTINGENCY!" I was still in disbelief.

"What?" the confusion in Noble One's voice was telltale.

"Look at your feet, Skirmishers," Rose spoke as I ascended six inches above her. Running my eyes up her silver and white frame. I felt a wave comfort and relaxed a little before hardening myself for what was about to come.

The screams of civilians. The tears of mothers and fathers that were denied a proper burial for their children. So many young faces shouldering a rifle for the first time never to make it back to the evac bird. While others are scarred for life when they see children fruitlessly trying to wake their parents and lovers cradling their lost.

Our seas and oceans will boil, and our mountains shall be set a blaze till only molten slag remained. Skyscrapers will fall on to themselves as their weight becomes too much to bear trapping so many innocent souls beneath them waiting for the coming fire. The horrid smell of a world burning will become etched into the memories of the few unlucky survivors to haunt them for the rest of their days.

And when Reach falls it won't be long before the Covenant finds and burns my homeworld Tribute as well. It is only a matter of time before the rest will come crashing down like dominos set a blaze in their so called "holly fire." Looking around at my fellow SPARTANS there was a wave of despair that our armor couldn't hide. So I slid my arm around Rose's waist and gave her a squeeze not caring about the opinions of any possible conservatives in the room before I walked over to the doorway where Carter stood.

"Listen up." I open my short comm on all UNSC frequencies. "If the Covenant wants Reach they're gonna have to earn it. We're going to put 'em through a level hurt that will make 'em second guess the decrees of their Gods every step of the way - and deliver 'em straight to a hell that seems more like Heaven when we're through with them." Noble Team started prepping their weapons. "They claim we are demons so let's prove 'em right and bleed 'em dry at every step of the way till they're slipping on their dead to face us."

"Damn straight." Emile spoke up ready to give those alien rat bastards hell to pay for stepping on to Reach.

"We're SPARTANS. Against us their numbers are worthless. Only when our last clip runs dry will they advance their way forward into our fists. So load up watch your six and check your fire, or Chief Mendez is bound to show up and kick our arses all the way back to basic for embarrassing him and the SPARTAN legacy."

There was a light chuckle in the air now as Carter gave the order "All right Noble let's move out."

Taking point I watch my motion trackers as a red bleep pops up with

the familiar garble of a Jackal moving through the vent in front of me. Immediately I open up on the glint of a green eyes peering through the vents and was rewarded by a steady flow of purple blood running out of the duct. The unfortunate jackal was a rasping heavily for air as we made our way into the courtyard and upon its friends it was probably planing on warning before we got to the second building with a clear line of fire on them.

Past the bridge and up the hill through the reinforcements a Spirit dropship deployed in a vain attempt to slow our momentum. We reached a creek that separated us from the enemy. All side conversation didn't even register till after I was snapping the neck of a fleeing grunt and tossing its corpse at a charging Ultra with an energy sword. It falters and I break the distance between us in less than a second as I tackle it into a hay role. I swing my carbine like a cudgel across its face shattering its shields on impact before ripping out it's throat with my free hand.

Following my tracker I spy a second one staring at me in pure horror to my left. I don't hesitate as I immediately grab one of the dead ultra's plasma grenades and hurl it at the Elites head with enough force to knock it on its rear before it blows up in its face.

Not waiting to be cornered I move to where the last two blips remained taking cover behind the hay. I charge the one to the left returning fire with it's back turned. Unsheathing my combat knife I grab the unsuspecting Ultra from behind and deal the final blow. A 20 centimeters deep cut from left to right along its windpipe. Turning my head to the right the final elite already has me in it's sights but is too dumbstruck by the sight of its squirming comrade to do anything but gape. I merely wave a goodbye as I watch Rose sneak up its six and assassinate the Ultra without remorse.

"That makes eighteen for me you?" I ask.

"Twenty-four," Rose declared proudly.

"Twenty-fourâ€¦? How?"

"Grunts." She said with a bashful glance as her silver visor depolarizes upon her advance, "Your not jealous are you?"

Her ice-blue eyes gleaming as she taped my visor where my noses would be. Re-shouldering my rifle I wish I could brush the stray strands of cardinal red hair from her eyes, "Game's not over yet."

Stuck in the helo with Jun I can't help but smile as I have nearly doubled my score with in a matter of minutes behind the scope of my custom SRS99 with an extended mag and specialized sights. Jun was hard to read for the most part as we provided Rose, Jorge, and Carter sniper support he only radioed them when we spotted movement.

"Where you at?" Six radios me.

"Thirtyâ€¦." I line up my sights on a trio of grunts perfectly lined up for the kill and pull the trigger, "Eight you?"

"One second," I watch as she dives the flatbed truck carrying Noble's One and Five straight into a group of grunts and jackals.

"Forty."

"Damn Woman ya can drive," I joke as I put down an elite with grunt escort down earning a nod of approval from Jun.

She laughs, "Well I had a good teacher."

"He must be brilliant devil." I fire the last of my mag, "Forty-eight."

"Pretty much taught me everything there is to know about the forbidden art of road-rage."

I laugh as Jun shakes his head watching her reckless driving, "Reaper Sir, remind me never to piss her off when she has keys in her hands."

"You and me both," I joke as we thin another patrol. "I think I created a monster."

"Good way to save bullets though," reminded the Falcon's pilot.

We continued to thinning the covenants numbers from the air until we evacuated the missing troopers held up in someone's garage. Their faces were worn and tired as they exhausted the last of their adrenaline to get onto the evac helo. Soon we were in the air again Six was in the middle of me and Jun while Jorge and Noble Lead sat across from us.

"I got 56, what you get Cap?" Rose turned to me.

"63," I said as I zoomed in on a roaming family of Gã°ta and resisted the urge to shoot and waste ammo while knowing full well the damage a single one could inflict on it's own.

"Had fun sniping, huh?" she teased.

"The view could have been better," I said as I turning my head towards her. Looking into her eyes we both depolarize our visors. "though it seems to be really improving right now to be honest ya."

I smirk as she polarizes he visor and looks away hiding a crimson face. Jorge laughs while the other two passengers shakes their heads at the corny line. Sometimes I can't help but laugh at how much we SPARTANS have changed. There was a time when we would report illicit fraternization. Now it was only a problem when it interfered with the mission. Anything outside of that was just not your problem.

Listening to Carter and Kat subtly flirt on the comm, I wondered how they acted off mission if they were like Rose and I. Or worse?

"Approaching the Comm outpost," the Falcon's pilot speaks as I unleash a barrage of HMG fire from the side mount gun into the Covenant advancing on Kat and Emile, before holding off as we land. I tear the gun off the hinges despite the pilots angry protest.

Soon Jorge and I let loose our combined turrets dropping the last of the resistance before separating at the door. I make my way to the

catwalk above for a better angle. Rose was already there lying prone with her DMR at the ready knowing for the sure that a counter strike with plenty Covie reinforcements would come eventually.

Listening to Kat's progress I watch a Spirit drops off the first wave. I count in my head to five as they bunch up under Rose's precision fire before poring on the lead. It wasn't long till the second drop-ship came in. It's main gun peppers my Black Prototype's superior shields. I just ignore the faulty drop-ship fire and unleash the last of the mini-gun's fire on a trio of Elites minors and one Ultra backed by grunts taking cover from Jorge's own barrage. It almost seemed unfairâ€¦almost.

"Kat?" I hear Carter on the line

"Just about...there! We're in!" was her answer.

"Everybody inside! Go, go, go!" Carters booms as I drop the empty HMG and switch to the MA5K clinging to the magnet strip on my back.

"Target hit!" Carters voice declares. I look to Rose 'I'm ready' she nods to my questioning glance before we leap to ground level. Reorienting myself as we drop to a crouch I fire on the approaching group with Rose at my side as we fall back to the closing blast doors.

"Cover them!" Carter yells as if giving us an invitation. We bolt it for the door with plenty of time to spare. I spin around to help Carter and Emile cover the door making sure nothing got through.

"Lets find that control room, and get the word out before we get over run," I speak to the Commander swapping out a fresh mag for his DMR. Carter simply nods in agreement.

"Noble find that control room. Emile, post here. If we flush any hostiles, they're yours. All right, let's do this."

The lighting was poor even for my eyes so I switched on my VISR (Visual Intelligence System, Reconnaissance) I had promised ONI I'd field test it for the ODS'Ts eventual and I was growing fonder for it more and more. Sweeping every corner before moving to the other's position where Six was searching the body of a male scientist of eastern European descent probably in his mid-sixties. While Carter was talking to a wounded army trooper to our right.

"Found something," Rose held up a chip she found on the body that my armor's face recognition software identified to be Dr. Laszlo Sorvad.

"I'll take that, Six. Not your domain."

"That would be mine Two," I held out an open palm for the chip. " Dr. Laszlo Sorvad is a ONI Xenoarchaeology. You and I both know that anything he touches is Tier One classified."

Begrudgingly the Lieutenant Commander places the clip in my hand as I place it in a secure compartment in my armor for safe keeping.

"I've got a live one over here. Come on, out you come." Jorge gently pulls a struggling young woman out of hiding, she was yelling up a storm in Hungarian while attempting to punch her way free of his grip. "It's all right, we're not going to hurt you."

"Jorge..." Carter questioned as I do my best to remember what little Hungarian Jorge had taught to the rest of us IIs in our free time.

"I've got her." Was his answer as he placed his mini-gun down and grabs her by her arms, "Keep still, and I'll release you."

"MÃ©g...Itt vannak." (? still here...) I catch the last bit and raise my carbine just as an Elite Zealot with an energy sword drops from the floor above accompanied by two others. Rose opens up on the Field Marshall just after it attempted to decapitate Jorge and the civilian who he was shielding.

"What's your status, over?" Emile radios in

"We've been engaged!" Carter yells on the comm while I emptied what was left in my clip into the Zealot to my left and switched to my SOCOM as the Marshall blows past me and takes a swing at Kat who is pushed clear of the blade by Carter. Rose puts 25 consecutive rounds into the charging Zealot Field Marshal tearing its shields down before it knocks her to the ground and makes for the exit.

Carter signals Emile, "Bad guy coming out!" As one of the underling Zealots jumps on Rose and grabs her by the neck with its energy dagger out she decks it with a clean right hook surprising it as I kick it off her with enough force to take down its shield and fire a round clean through its skull with my pistol.

"That tango blew past me. Permission to pursue?" Emile radios the others again as I charge past him getting back up on his feet and the blast door that had somehow been forced open.

"I'm on it...Four stay on the entrance." I immediately open up on the Zealot fleeing to a Phantom parked out front. Emile must have emptied a few shells on it already because its shield collapsed after two controlled bursts from my MA5K allowing me to put a burst in its leg and then another in the opposite. The Marshall roared in a painful rage before it kissed the pavement.

"Zealot Lead is down. Beginning interrogation," I radio the others as I kick the sword out of its grip and then put a few rounds into its wrists to avoid any nasty surprises from energy daggers. Moaning in pain it barely objects when I relieve it of all the explosives it was carrying.

"Sorry," I said as I activate the my suit's covenant language translation program immediately the elite stops struggling under the pressure of my foot as it looks at me in disbelief.

"Can't have you martyring yourself with those now can we?" I point to the collection of plasma grenades well out of reach, "Now your going to answer my questions, understood?"

It spits in my face then laughs. Ignoring the spit as I pressed

harder on it's chest with my foot and lean on it while drawing Daisy's knife to show the Elite the blade. The blood of the Ultra I killed earlier was still drying. "Either answer my questions, or I bleed you of all of your precious honor like a helpless grunt."

It growled with hatred as it attempt to stare me down to show its courage, "Speak Demon."

"Why did you come here?"

"For the great journey. So all covenant may find reclamations and be in their light."

"So you were looking for information on the Forerunners."

"Cursed Demon the name of the Gods is not yours to speak!"

"Why is that? From the reports I received we humans are the only ones who do not set off the artifacts defense systems."

"Lies Reclamation is not yours to hold!"

"And the another thing your saying it wrong it's not Reclamation it's Reclaimer."

"Whaâ€|? DEMON LIES NOTHING MORE!"

"You'd take the word of the treacherous worms that claim swhat does not belong to 'em over the word of a fellow warrior?"

I watched with mixed amusement as the elite resisted the commonsense with a flurry of words that did not translate repeating "Wort" after every other syllable. "We will burn your world till it is just fire and ash-"

I fire my pistol pointblank in its head as I get off the Zealots corpse and retrieve it's energy sword, "Niceâ€|."

I headed back after that and confirmed Carter's claim of the WINTER CONTINGENCY to Holland.

Later on I join up with Rose at HQ, "115 you?"

"I guess it's a tie," she tosses her helmet aside onto my cot and wraps an arm around my neck as the other removes my bucket.

"Well, I guess we're going to have to hold a tiebreakerâ€|again," I spoke seductively pulling her in as our noses crossed our lips parted, andâ€|.

"Uncle wake up!"

"Huh?"

Charles opens his eyes with grown as he doesn't register his niece attempting to shake him from his sleep. "wake up Uncle!"

"Oh," the SPARTAN moans, "ten more minutes Rose."

Confused Tali continued, "Uncle wake up, we're here on

Noveria."

"What? How did we get here so fast?"

"You slept through the whole ride," she flatly stated "the Commander has been waiting for you this whole time."

The Two gets to his feet and grabs Senti's holo on the way to the elevator, "Thanks for waking me."

"No problem," she yawned as she followed him out and up the left stairs. "Soâ€¦ Who is Rose?"

Charles stops in mid-step as his memories begin overshadow him again. Looking at his generally curious niece he sighs "SPARTAN-B312. She was a kind and beautiful woman with a unique spark all her own."

"Really? Tell me about her." She said as they continued to approach a waiting patiently Shepard who was avoiding eye contact with the SPARTAN as the rest of the crews specialist stood idly by.

Not completely comfortable with revealing his full past so soon to a group of complete stranger he said the first thing that came to mind, "When your older."

"What?" She said without considering the others around them, "But I'm twenty-two now! Uncle Charlieâ€¦!"

"Uncle Charlie?" everyone questioned simultaneously.

Sensing what the day would bring an overly audible sigh of frustration escaped the SPARTAN's persona as he wished he could just slip back into the comforts of a dream that was now just a memory.

5. Chapter 4

Chapter 4

"Equalizing interior pressure with exterior atmosphere," the Normandy's VI systematically reported to the occupants of the a rather cramped airlock. Wrex and 009 already took up a reasonable amount of the space on their own combined with the collective of Kaidan, Ashley, Tali, Garrus, and Shepard only made it more of a squeeze. Shepard was showing and telling about the ring she had just received from her late husband from beyond the grave.

She seemed to be tolerating Charles's presence for the most part. The recently declared widow was avoiding the SPARTAN intently like a plague for killing her father. Grateful that she hadn't pulled a shotgun on him yet he decided to let a sleeping dog lie for now.

009 half absorbed the explanation from Tali on how he came to know the 'Zorahs. Apparently Charles was one of the original Assault Recon Marine instructors that trained her father and the other candidates. As expected the SPARTAN became real close with some of the conscripts. Tali's father being one of them.

It turned out the alias Uncle Charlie was the result of a six year old Tali trying to pronounce his 'funny-name.' Then the Sith-Imperial War happened and Darth Krayt was gunning for the SPARTAN more than ever. So Charles thought it would be best to avoid all civilian aspects of his life for the time being to protect his new found family and friends and just drop off the radar.

"That's far enough," a woman in black private security hard-suit commanded.

"We're here to pick up an order and then be on our way," Shepard sounded in no mood for problems today as she declared the reason for their coming unannounced.

"This is an unscheduled arrival. I need to see your credentials,"

"Ladies first," Charles spoke up as he towered over Shepard.

"We're the law here. Show some respect." A blond guard's words seemed to loose power as she eyed the SPARTAN warily.

"Respect has to be earned Miss?"

"I'm Captain Maeko Matsuo, Elanus Risk Control Services." The brunette from before butted in to avoid an incident, "and this is Sergeant Kaira Stirling."

"Commander Elizabeth Shepard of the Normandy, Council Spectre."

"Supreme Commander Sierra-009 SPARTAN II Commando of the United Provinces of Mandalore Armed Forces."

"Load of horse-crap, ma'am." Stirling spoke again Charles decided to give the blond the mandalorian stare to see if she had the balls to look him in the eye after making that remark. So far she seemed to have none.

"We will need to confirm that." Captain Matsuo began again hoping to avoid open conflict, "Also, I must advise you that firearms are not permitted on Noveria. Sergeant Stirling, secure their weapons."

All at once the team of specialists drew their weapons. Charles ignites one of two plasma sword he had holstered. A wave of fear became apparent in the faces of the ERCS officers as they watch the SPARTAN reach for the other hilt on his left thigh before unsheathing it as well.

"Don't try it," Wrex growled.

"Let's not start a fight," Elizabeth spoke

"Why not, they're scared shitless already?"

"Captain Matsuo!" a new voice spoke firmly as a group of armed Mandalorians decloaked from behind the ERCS, "Tell your people to lower their weapons from the Mandalore and his associates. NOW."

"Stand down," Matsuo turned around to face the mandalorian woman in black heavy assault beskar'gam with the letters MARS written in white on her left breastplate like the rest of the half-dozen privateers in Charles's employ. "Colonel Price why wasn't ERCS informed of the Mandalore's arrival."

"Because this will be a brief visit and they have more pressing matters to attend to than being harassed by Risk Control, now Slana'pir (Get lost)," She gestured with her thumb towards the door.

Matsuo stared at the mandalorian woman for a moment before waving off her subordinates.

"Behave yourselves," Stirling muttered in defeat as she eyed the well armed MARS security detail then her own equipment with a sliver of envy.

After a brief moment the colonel shook her head before approaching the SPARTAN with a solute. "Sir, It's good to see you again," she spoke as Charles got down on a knee to give her a hug causing a stir of surprise from the others at the gesture.

"Su'cuy gar (a friendly greeting "so you're still alive")? Anira how are you? How's the baby?"

"She is good Charles, REAL good," she sighs in relief as she rubs her belly with a three digit hand that didn't escape Tali's notice as she also took noted the Quarian hijab that nearly blend in with her black armor.

"So it's a she?"

"Yes I just had an ultra sound a weeks ago. She has her father's hands and feet."

"Reallyâ€¦no clear Quarian features yet?"

"Well, it was hard to tell but she might have my ears."

A sudden cough broke up the conversation about younglings as 009 looked back to an annoyed Shepard. "Of course where are my manners Colonel Anira'Price nar Concordia of MARS Security this is Lieutenant Commander Elizabeth Shepard Council Spectre, Staff Lieutenant Kaidan Alenko and Gunnery Chief Ashley Williams of the Systems Alliance, Investigator Garrus Vakarian of C-sec, Urdnot Wrex of clan Urdnot, Tali'Zorah nar Ordo my niece, and of course you already know Senti."

"Pleasure." Anira said with a respectful nod before turning all business, "Now most of the equipment and parts you ordered are being delivered to you ship as I speak. But, you'll have to come with me to our MARS facility to get your new gear."

"Lead the way," Shepard gesture with a simple wave.

The walk to the facility was amusing to say the least as they watch the local businesspersons and ERCS give them wide births while Charles kept offering Colonel Price some extended leave with pay for her and the baby. But the mother of the first quarian/human hybrid

waved off the offer saying she was fine and then lectured Charles about worrying too much.

"Keelah! Charles you mustn't concern yourself so much. You sound like an old man," Anira laughed with the chorus from the others.

"Well...technically I am. Even If you didn't count the time in cryo I'm eighty-two years old ner vod (my friend/sibling)." Charles reminded as they passed through the security checkpoint at the entrance of the facility. They were walking along a contained glass catwalk showcasing all the noncritical projects MARS Industries was cooking up.

"Eighty-two? Damn I hope I look that good when I'm that age," Ashley whispered to the others causing a wave of chuckles.

While the SPARTAN shook his head, "How has the treatment been going Anira, are the nanites working properly can you still not take off your helmet in public?"

"Actual the program is going quite well. Now I no longer have to take antibiotics and herbal supplements to bolster my immune system to kiss my husband orâ€|.other things," she shyly looked a way to say the last bit.

"Wellâ€|that'sâ€|good to hear I'll bet John is quite happy about that," Charles coughed while the others blinked in surprise.

"It's strange though." She said as an inferno of flames shot up against the glass surprising the everyone well...except for Wrex and the two Mandos.

"Oh?"

"When you live most of your life inside a suit you tend to feel vulnerable when you take it off."

Charles chuckled as they finally reached a room with seven containers five small ones next to a medium and large. "Believe me when I say I can relate. I'm guessing the bigger one is mine?"

"Yes, it is. Men's changing rooms are to the left. Ladies to the right," she gestured before giving the boy's their privacy.

"Why's yours the biggest?" The krogan grumbled.

"Because I'm taller maybe," the SPARTAN played dumb to the fact that half a ton of armor would require a bigger box and a stronger individual.

"Hmâ€|." He grunted to the SPARTAN while carrying his own box with Garrus and Kaidan in tow.

"What now?" Charles asked when they finally reach what looked more like a simple locker room to change in before gently placing his new suit down on the floor wary of the bench handling the weight.

"How far is this cure?"

"We're getting there. But we'd get there a lot faster if we had actual test subjects to study instead of tissue samples and fetal remains."

"But how close?"

He sighs, "ten years at the earliest."

"With all dew respect you two, but is that wise?" Garrus asked with a little concerned.

"Kid does have a point," Wrex grunted as he removed the upper torso of his old heavy mercenary armor and began prying off his boots.

"The council already informed us that that the treatment will be illegal in citadel space. Which means anyone who is interested would have to move to a commonwealth territory and conform to our laws for the treatment."

"Why is that?" The LT spoke up while assembling his new infiltration variant beskar'gam with unnecessary extra care not to scratch the navy blue camo paint job.

"Well as of the moment it's not a simple process. Without any way of testing the gene-therapy. The treatments will have to be done slowly and carefully," Charles began removing his armor first his helmet, then gauntlets, followed by his arms, and torso. "Plus, we don't want another Krogan Rebellion on our hands so some strict government oversight will be needed to help prevent over population of the few uncolonized worlds we reserved."

"Awfully generous of you what's the catch? And don't say taxes again," Wrex questioned as he took notice of the fact that the SPARTAN had accumulated far more scars than the seasoned battlemaster.

"Contribute to the commonwealth as a whole for starters," Wrex gave an inquiring look, so he continued. "For example in the past decade Quarrians have secured themselves quite the little corner in the electronics and the entertainment market. As for us Mandalorians? We produce the largest percentage of grain in commonwealth space and rear by far the most domestic animals. We also have a strong mining industry alongside the Sangheili. The people of Sanghelios craft some of the finest civilian airspeeders and luxury items around - and stole the music industry thanks to their massive lung capacity. While the Jiralhanae produce the largest percentage fruits and vegetables in Commonwealth space - and have one of strongest medical industries to date."

"So why aren't they helping with finding us a cure?"

"Many are." He said while rubbing the ink inscribed on his left shoulder, "Some of the finest medical minds from Doisac have offered their services to the project. Along with hundreds more of the finest physicians in known space."

"Hmphâ€|so what's with the bird?" Wrex gestured to the black raptor with its wings spread clutching a trio of arrows in its left talons and a thunderbolt in the others. A single star stood above it as

empty shield bordering the bird of prey.

"It's the insignia of the SPARTAN IIs. The program I wasâ€¦conscripted into. Who's Aleena?" 009 pointed the name engraved into the krogan's thickest hide plate of his chest in Asari.

"Somebody I should have never let slip through my fingers," he looked crestfallen to the floor before looking up. "How about you Bucket?"

"I've already lost twoâ€¦I'd rather not go into details." Charles returned the sullen look before looking up to the others who remained silent. "Kaidan, Garrus any stories."

"Well, there is always this one girl that come to mind when I was in brain camp, her name was Rahna."

"Brain camp?" Garrus asked.

"BAaT?" Charles muttered inaudibly, while pulling on the mark XIII under-suit. It had a smell he loved that was reminiscent of a new speeder.

"Biotic Acclimation and Temperance Training or BAaT, was an Alliance initiative funded and run by a biotic firm called Conatix Industries," Kaidan recited from the invisible pamphlet. "For us trainees it was just Brain Camp."

"A former Cabal was hired to run the project. Commander Vyrnnus right?" Charles spoke up as he began locking his armor's plates in place then double checking them to be sure they were secure.

"Yeahâ€¦" the biotic hesitated. "You knew him?"

"Meet him once before Conatix contracted him," Charles made a not so subtle look of distaste the others picked up on. "Not sure what they were thinking hiring him. Too unstably bias if you asked me."

Kaidan snorted as Charles continued, "From what I herd he got what was coming to him from one his trainees."

"What happened?" The turian investigator asked.

"There were a few stories that got leaked to the press. My favorite is the one about the trainee who snapped Vyrnnus's neck with his biotics to protect a friend," 009 gave Kaidan a respectful nod while his mind went back to the time he saved Sierra-141 from a drunken abusive instructor.

"What about you turian?" Wrex prodded.

"Hmm?" Garrus leaned back for a moment to collect his thoughts before his mandibles fluttered into the turian equivalent of a devilish smile. "Well, there was this one recon scout during my time in the Turian military."

"Uh-oh this should be good," Kaidan chuckled as he and the others noticed the suggestive tone coming from the C-Sec officer.

Garrus began to reminisce, "I remember this one mission when I was still a ground-pounder. We were about to hit a batarian pirate base-

"Taking advantage of traumatized slave girl gratitude doesn't count whelp," Wrex interrupted.

"Uh? Wrex he said she was a recon scout not a slave remember?" Charles defended the turian while adjusting to his disbelief at the lightness of his new mark XIII's beskar'gam chest plate despite it being thicker like his old mark IV. "You were saying Garrus."

"Umâ€|right. As I was saying we were ordered to take out a pirate group that had been reported preying on the local merchant and cargo vessels for the past few months. Intel was not promising, if not vague. So we were a little tense at the thought of "going in blind" as you humans say." Garrus began while adjusting his forearm bands equal impressed by the lightness of mandalorian steel.

"This recon scout named Taira and I had been nipping at each other's throats for most of the tripâ€|nerves mostly. So she suggested we settle it in the ring."

"Ring?" Kaidan ask

"Full contact sparring," the SPARTAN was now checking if his gauntlets were secure.

"You mean Turian ships have people beating each other up before missions?" The Lieutenant surprised.

"Like mandalorians, turians have more personal freedoms to help compensate for the numerous rules and regulations enforced by our militaries," Charles explained while adding one of the charcoal grey colored plates to his right arm an olive green band ran around it to match the one on his right thigh.

"So what happened?" the human biotic asked.

Garrus chuckled, "What didn't happen? Unfortunately for me both of us were two of the top-ranked hand-to-hand specialists on the ship. It turned into a vicious nine rounds of uncle. I had reach, but she had flexibility. A draw was eventually called by a judge."

"Thereâ€|were quite a few disappointed bettors in the training room that day." Garrus rolled his neck with a smirk, "We decided to hold a tiebreaker in her quarters. She had her flexibility, but I had plenty of Reach."

They all chuckled Wrex most of all surprisingly as he slapped the turians back with praise that nearly knocked Garrus over, "Your all right kid. You'd have made a great Krogan."

"Uhâ€|thanksâ€|I thinkâ€|?"

"Well, thats one way to work off the tension." Kaidan joked as Reaper secured his shoulder guards with an invisible smirk.

"Ugh! You men are all the same," Sentinel blurted out from the speakers of the Mark VII helmet still resting on a bench in the middle of them. "Is that all you guys think about?"

"Pretty much," Wrex deadpanned with little disregard for the AI's opinion.

Charles walked over to the VII helmet to retrieve the synthetic teen from her home but stopped in mid-reach as he noticed the still active helmet camera.

"Sentinel-1452-Vinci." The SPARTAN deadpanned as he slipped on the VII's helmet and noticed a transmitting icon in the corner being cut, "To who and for how long?"

The AI's thought processes began to lag as she tried to come up with any excuse to worm her way out the trouble she was in. Senti knew the SPARTAN was upset the only other time he showed zero emotion was when he was when he was in the middle of a firefight and the feed coming from his SPARTAN II neural-interface only confirmed her fears.

In less than a fifth of a millisecond Senti had reviewed all the conversations she had had with her protector in the past thirty-five years and made only one conclusion. There was no way out. Slowly she attempt to formulate a list of words necessary to ease the soon to come repercussions the cyborg would likely bring. Knowing full well that lying was out of the question with that damned lie detector of his. Sentinel chose to speak the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help her SPARTAN.

The AI mentally cursed Williams for talking her into becoming a peep hole to the men's changing room.

"I guess I should start from the beginning, huh?" she whispered.

"That'd be a start," He remained neutral.

A few minutes earlier the AI adolescent was chatting up Shepard and the girls via a link she had established with their omni-tools as they entered the women's locker room. Anira had guided Tali to a decontamination booth before departing to answer a craving for something sour for her growing passenger.

"I never thought it was possible for quarians and humans to reproduce with one another," Tali spoke from behind the ray shield clearly surprised by the thought of a hybrid being born of the two races.

"Yeah fascinatingâ€¦." William said with disinterest before moving towards a more awkward subject of choice. "So Tali what are you going to do now that your childhood crush is your Uncle."

The young quarian thought about it for a moment as she released her suits seals. It wasn't really a crush. It was more of an admiration that had lead her and many other girls she grew up with to becoming fangirls. There was even a time she had a thing for Arbiter Thel'Vadum while in high school. "Move on. There are plenty of heroic men in the universe to chase after. If I ever feel the need."

"Still haven't you wonder what he looks like under that helmet?"

"Not really. Before he became engrossed with his work I had seen his face plenty of times when I was little." She removed her visor revealing a slightly pale grey face that was surprisingly human with a striking pair of bioluminescent eyes. The unveiling had earned a duo of gapping stares from Shepard and Williams.

"What?" she said slightly embarrassed as she removed her violet hijab and then the rest of her helmet connected to a number of tubes that were well hidden by the veil.

"Tali yourâ€¦" Shepard stuttered as the quarian ruffled her short white hair for the first time in months while eyeing the commander nervously.

"Beautiful?" Ashley said as she questioned how stunning the quarian looked with her glowing eyes and pointed vulpine like ears

Tali blushed a deep blue hue reminding the two humans that she was in fact of another species. This was not the response she had been expecting as her golden eyes observed the two humans for the first time without a violet hues in the way. Her eyes stung a little as they adjusting to the flood of foreign colors.

"Thank you," she said with a smile revealing a rather impressive set of double canines that causing Ash to pale as she recalled certain human myths echoing from Transylvanian.

"Why did he show you his face?" Shepard decided to pick up where Williams left off.

"The first time I meet my Uncle I was six years old at the time," she sighed as she removed the snug environmental suit while the others undressed as well. "As you can imagine a fully armored mandalorian is an intimidating sight to behold even today. Imagine one over seven feet tall enter your home at six."

"So he showed you his face," Shepard caught on.

"Yes, eventually it became a habit for him every time he visited."

"So you know what the Mandalore looks like then?" Ashley began again.

"Yesâ€¦well assuming he hasn't changed much in the last seven years," Tali began recall her uncle's features. "He was very paleâ€¦for a human. Brown hair cut short with hints of his grey and a light beard. Glowing yellow gold synthetic eyes and scars. Too many scarsâ€¦".

"Glowing? So those are his eyes we're seeing from behind his visor?" Shepard was surprised at the thought.

"Yes," Tali said while reading the model and then the make engraved into the coltan-titanium plating of her armor's under-suit 'NANOSUIT GEN2 Mark 3.5 MARS Industries.'

"Any idea how he lost them," Shepard was growing curious once more as Tali pulled out a new violet hijab to compliment her new suit's non-reflective purple hues with grey trimming.

"He never said. I only know what the commonwealth historical archive says," Tali remained in sync with the others as she pull on the under-suit of her new combat harness before she would attach the beskar plates that would go over her chest and extremities.
"Senti?"

"I only know what his file says and even that is vague," the AI spoke from their omni-tools. "On January 3, 2525 on the outer colony of Biko. SPARTAN-009 encountered a Sangheili Zealot later recorded as Rtas'Vadum for the first time. Apparently he spotted a child stuck in a burning vehicle and attempted to break off from his fight with Rtas to save him. The Zealot thought he was fleeing from battle dishonorably and pursued 009 nearly taking his head off. Charles barely avoided the attempt on his life and lost his eyes in the process andâ€|that's about it. The rest I'm sure you herd from Ripa"

"Greatâ€|now I'm even more curious." Ashley spoke with annoyance before an impish thought creeped into her mind, "Hey Sentinel I have question."

"What is it?" The AI said nervously as she detected the change in the Chief's vocal patterns.

"Where are you right now?"

"In the Mark VII helmet, why?"

"Can you still upload video?"

"Eww your gross you know that!" Senti exclaimed.

"How am I gross?"

"It would be like spying on your older brother as he got dressed that's how."

"Come on Senti how often does the Mandalore reveal his face to other people?" William pleaded her case as Shepard shook her head in annoyance at the new direction the conversation had taken. While Tali seemed to be too engrossed in understanding the new features of her suit to care what was going on around her after sealing the violet pilot variant helmet.

"Rarelyâ€|.only people he considers family have seen his face," Senti thought back to when Charles willingly showed his face to her for the first time. It had taken a whole month for the SPARTAN to trust the young AI after he came out of cryo.

"Then this could be a once in a life time opportunity for us. Come on what's the worst that can happen?" The alliance marine prodded, "You don't even have to watch if you don't want to."

"Fine, but I'm disabling the audio." Senti conceded with an ultimatum.

"Well your no fun." Ash merely pouted

Present

>"We tuned in just as Garrus was being oddly chewed out by Wrex about slave girls," Senti finished awaiting to be scolded.<p>

"You said to Williams you turned off the audio?" Charles questioned.

"I turned it off for them. I on the other hand heard the whole thing from Wrex sulking about your box being bigger to Garrus and his REACH." Senti laughed a little hoping it would lighten her SPARTAN's mood.

Charles shifted in his new armor for a moment. "Do you really think of me as elder brother?" he seemed surprised almost touched by the sentiment now lingering in his mind above everything else. It had been so long time since he had an actual little sister. Not since the bombing that orphaned him all those millennia ago.

"Well yeahâ€|. That or a very close cousin," she laughed awkwardly with a little embarrassment that she revealed how much her stoic protector meant to her. "So how much trouble am I in? Is it my extranet, or Galaxy of Fantasy, *sigh* I'm loosing Mugbook aren't I?"

Contemplating all the her suggestions the SPARTAN gave a customary grunt that wasn't really an answer merely a foreboding of things to come. 009 knew full well it drove the her up the proverbial wall.

"Wellâ€|." AI's were never known for their patience especially smart ones like Senti. She could review the entire history of the know universe and still find time to play solitaire in the few seconds it would take Charles or anyone else for that matter to give an answer.

"Well what?" Charles said simply while removing her Riemann Matrix from his old helmet and sliding the disk into the slot of the new GEN4 armor.

"Well which is it?"

He simply shrugged his shoulders, "I'll think about it."

"Gahrrr!" The artificial adolescent became exasperated, "Your doing this on purpose!"

Charles just sighed for probably the millionth time today and put to practice the old SPARTAN II tradition of silence is golden. He soon began a full suit follow up with a few blinks of the eye and a thought or two in the right direction. "Check your gear and check it twice and then do it again! Since you lot seem to have so much time to kill!" Mendez's voice echoed in his mind as he stuck to the drills he memorized to heart word for word.

Echoes of their task master came in at full force as he dismissed how thrilled Senti was about all the leg room she had in the XIII compared to the old VII. He was reminiscing about his time spent under the Chief Petty Office before his promotion to Senior. Mendez

was tough but fair to Charles and the others. It was only understandable they grew up respecting him. So many words of wisdom like "Rule 1: Kill them before they kill you," "Always carry spare pairs of socks (magazines) when out on patrol," "Listen, retain, respond," "Rule 17: Always make sure they're dead," and the one 117 took to heart the most, "Your team loses, you lose. You don't win until your team wins."

What he did to them was monstrous sure. Charles knew that but he also knew why he did what he did. Perhaps it was guilt that caused him to reveal part of himself to 009 that one day. Perhaps it was a last bit attempt at regaining some of his humanity.

June 12th, 2520: Medical, SPARTAN II Program Classified Location, Reach

>"You got a death wish 009 or are you just that plain stupid?" Chief Petty Officer Franklin Mendez the toughest son of a bitch on this side of the galaxy began his lecture to the nine year old recuperating in medical with an IV running into his arm while the other appendage was in a cast.<p>

"Meh Dad always said a leader is willing to bleed for those they lead, Sir." The blue eyed nine year old answered as he stared down the drill instructor not wavering even the slightest.

Mendez chuckled, "You got balls kid. I'll give you that."

009 looks at him confused clearly he didn't get the joke. "It means you got plenty of heart. Just like your Grandfather," he muttered the last bit to himself.

"You knew Grandad?" the sedatives clearly hadn't taken effect yet.

"Yeah. I did. I saved my life plenty of times," Mendez felt a tug of betrayal in his gut as he looked at the grandson of the man who was the main reason he was still here today. The legacy of a past friend and commanding officer.

"Sir?" Charles looked down towards the sheets and squeezed at his sore thighs before staring down the drill sergeant. "Will I ever be a hero like me Grandad?"

Mendez formed a rare smile at the determination in the young conscript's eyes, "You better, you have a long line heroes in your blood to live up to."

"What heroes?" there was an excited glint in his dark blue eyes the drill sergeant recognized as his grandfather's all too well.

"Sure. You've had heroes in your family dating back to second Great War."

"Really?"

"Haven't you ever heard of Colonel Sir Archibald David Stirling?"

"Who's that?"

"When you get the chance next history lesson ask DÃ©jÃ . You have some big shoes to fill 009," Mendez saluted the nine year old at the door "Now get some rest. I expect you to be green before the month is through."

"Yes, Sir!" Charles returned the gesture while fighting off the grogginess of the medication for a few more seconds before blacking out. Charles didn't understand why the Chief was 'nice' to him this time around. But then again the only other people Charles understood at the time was his fellow SPARTANS. It would be years later when he was recruited by Section Zero that he'd go over an unfiltered copy of the Chief's file and learned of the guilt that haunted Mendez. He was Project Orion, a SPARTAN One. There was little surprise there. What did surprise him was the fact he served under a Command Master Chief Petty Officer by the name of Charles A. Stirling.

It didn't take much for him to put two and two together Orion candidate 047 was very much his grandfather and from what he could find his mother's father had developed quite the career on making the impossible possible. Unfortunately Grandad's luck had ran out during Operation: TANGLEWOOD when he pushed a younger Franklin Mendez out of the line of fire from a hidden Innies HMG (heavy machine gun) emplacement. Ballistics trauma to the left temporal bone was the reported cause of death for Command Master Chief Petty Officer Charles A. Stirling at the age of 42. Officially there were no known living biological relatives.

Present:

>Unofficially 009 knew better as he reviewed all the latest upgrades for his Mark XIII.<p>

_[Codex/Technology Entry_SPARTAN II MJOLNIR GEN5 Mark XIII: The Mark XIII is more streamline and reminiscent of the old MJOLNIR GEN1 Mark IV but was more advance than any model yet conceived. Unfortunately, the system is so reactive that normal human beings or SPARTAN IV/V cannot use the suit without injuring or even killing themselves.

>_New and improved Atmospheric Insertion Protocols (Armor Lock basically) without aid from a SOEIV (Single Occupant Exoatmospheric Insertion Vehicle).
_Automatic Biofoam-bacta injectors.

>_Two Micro Corusca Fusion Arc Reactors.
_Multi-layered Hard-light overshield-emitters to the tier level of six.

>_Wrist mounted Hard-light Daggers complete with forearm Enhanced Point Defense Gauntlets.
_Hard-light manipulators.

>_Standard Multi-environment Adaptive Camouflage or SMAC (think OctoCamo from Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots).
_Mark XII Active Camouflage (provides temporary invisibility for up to two hours and even hides a wearer's thermal and force signature).

>_Active Contender-class AI transfer protocols.
_Slipspace de-insertion capabilities.

>_Nano-technological components which enables the armor to repair and upgrade itself autonomously without outside influence.
_MRM & Hard light Chip rechargers ports.

>_Port and Starboard side rear thrusters capable of 90 second burn.}<p>

"You might want to take this slow and steady Ori'vod (big brother) the glass world you're used to living in just got a whole lot

frailer," Senti cautioned the Two while testing her new nickname for him since the truth was already out. To her surprise his heart skipped a few beat as she monitored his vitals, 'success!' she thought to herself.

"Thanks," he muttered as he reviewed the newly refined Force-Multiplying Circuits and Reactive Metal Liquid Crystal Layer. The readings were staggering even for him, "Maybe I over did it a little?"

"Maybe just a little," she teased. "But hey now you can pickup tanks with one arm tied behind your back."

"Hmmâ€¦".

"Or wrestle krayt dragons in your free time," the artificial adolescent continued.

"She's joking right?" Kaidan spoke up first after running a full systems check of his suit as well to get fully acquaint with his new Nanoshell.

"I'm afraid not," Charles slowly began to move around to get a feel for things. "It's like donning the Mark IV all over again."

"Wellâ€¦think of it as a challenge or mystery you like solving mysteries," the SPARTAN merely nods as she continues. "Bet your glad you got those secondary re-augmentations now huh?"

"Secondary re-augmentations?" Wrex and Garrus spoke up clearly out of sync as the LT crooked his head curiously.

Charles just shook his head in annoyance while they followed him out of the locker room to meet up with the girls. Who were surprisingly waiting for them already.

"What took you boys so long? We do have a colony to investigate." Williams scolded playfully.

"Ferosâ€¦right?" Garrus said as he casually pushed the locker room door open but stopped to stare at the steel handle that now retained an imprint of his palm, "Um wowâ€¦note to self be extra careful from now on."

Deciding now was the best time to explain the suit clears his throat to grab every ones attention, "All right listen up. As you can see from Mr. Vakarian's example your new suits enhance your natural abilities. Strength being one of 'em."

"Whaâ€¦what is this thing mad out of?" Turian struggled to find words as he looked at the handle and then his hand and then back again.

"It's made of a reactive fiber nano weave synthesized from micronized Beska (Mandalorian iron)."

"In English if you wouldn't mind?" the Human Biotic spoke up.

"Are any of you familiar with shuk'oroke?" Charles asked.

"Yeah I herd of them they augment their wearer's strength or something along those lines right?" the Krogan battlemaster resisted the urge to scratch his chin till he adjusted to the new armor.

"Crushgaunts? We're wearing suit sized crushgaunts!" Shepard finally broke from her vow of silence against the SPARTAN, "Are you insane?!"

Charles didn't answer and decided to let her vent. "We could accidentally kill somebody with these things!"

"And that's a bad thing?" Wrex had a feral grin on his face as he called to mind a few enemies that had been out of his reach for sometime.

"Commander with practice it can become like a second skin. Besides the onboard umb AI will guild you through the necessary adjustments step by step." 009's voice was calm and resolute, "the council may not want to accept it but Saren and his geth legion have declared war on both the Citadel and the Commonwealth we need an edge."

"WE? There is no WE you killed my Father! Partaylir haar'chak (Remember damn it)!" Shepard shoved her index into his golden visor. Her azure eyes were ablaze with biotic fury, "What kind of monster would wear such a thing?"

"I would," Wrex deadpanned with a smirk.

"Wrex SHUT UP!" she barked while the battlemaster resisted the urge to throttle her.

"Remember that picture of you and Simon the one you were showing to the others no less than a quarter of an hour ago?" Charles remained calm he knew this would happen eventually he just didn't realize so soon. "Your first date?"

"What about it?" she flushed on how Simon had so artfully pulled her in at the last second for a photo finish smooch. Shepard didn't fight it oddly enough she actually enjoyed the mandalorian's daring move as she wrapped her arms around his neck and went in for a second round on the tips of her toes. It was only a memory now.

"What was he wearing?" He remained even toned.

"He just had on his tactical beskar'gam. Simon just got off duty a few hours after his ship made port."

"You seem quiet intact from that evening," Charles deadpanned, Shepard merely raised an eyebrow for his point. "That was a first GEN model he was wearing. Considering how that technology was still in the experimentally stages back then I think Ghost handled himself quite well don't you? If he could control his beskar'gam surely you can too Commander."

The Spectre's eye's widened in disbelief, "As for your father I'm sorry that things turned out the way they did. If I had known of his vexed state early on perhaps I could have helped."

Tali then gasps along with most if not all of the MARS staff present in the room as the SPARTAN took a knee. "Ni ceta (I kneel (a very sincere apology)), "

This was unheard of! NO Mandalore in the history of their people had willingly kneeled to another or better yet apologized for their actions! "Commander Elizabeth Anne Shepard, ni trattok'or gar, gar buir, gar riduur, bal cuun droten (I failed you, your father, your husband, and our peoples). Ni Eparavur takisit par haar aaray ni gotal, (I apologies for the pain I created)."

The young Spectre was stunned although it wasn't common knowledge she had a tongue for xenolinguistics. During her N7 training Elizabeth proved to be quite the natural multilingual and thanks to Ghost her talent also included Mando'a. Now she was staring wide-eyed at the ancient cyborg who was kneeling before her and was still some how at eye level with the N7. She was utterly speechless - regardless if he was a convert or not there where certain things Mandalores never did and kneeling to say you are sorry was not one of them.

But, before she could say anything he dutifully rose slowly like a foregone golem being summoned to continue performing a task once given by its master ages ago.

"If Saren's ship is what I think it is then your galaxy is on the verge of fighting an enemy that took on the combined strength of both the Precursors and the Forerunners to beat." He looked at his right and squeezed it into a fist causing the beskar plates to expand thrice there normal size to accommodate the muscle underneath. Charles all the while remaining emotionless in tone. "I swore an oath to serve and protect. To be the shield and sword for those who have none. I WILL not break it now."

Shepard remained silent, "If you want me, I will remain. But make no mistake Shepard this is my fight as well. My people have established for themselves lives in this galaxy and I will not abandon 'em nor will I your own."

Finished he saluted in crisp UNSC fashion and left for the entrance with Tali in hot pursuit attempting to find out what the devil just happened. Wrex looked at the baffled Commander and then to the growing smaller SPARTAN and questioning niece down the hall and then back to the human again before opting to follow the cybernetic commando muttering, "Someone's gotta watch your back Bucket."

The others just stared at the Commander. Garrus walked up to her to say something but with every try he stopped himself to reconsider his words carefully. Finally after what seemed like the sixth attempt the turian spoke, "What do you want to do Commander?"

She looked up to meet the alien's gaze that translated into, "Are you all right?" in her mind.

"I'll be fine" the N7 sighs in frustration from the realization she had just stepped into minefield right off the bat of their operation. The commander had possibly just lost three of her specialists one of which had a boatload of credits, political and military assets he was all too willing to share. Hell all their suits combined could have probably bought the Normandy a new drive core or two. She didn't even want to imagine what all the ordinance, ammo, and upgrades for the

Mako might cost. But she knew it was pretty penny.

Shepard could now hear all her past commanding officers yelling at her to get her arse back inline. "Stow it marine! We ain't got time for your personal shit! We got civvies to save!"

Looking down the hall where probably the most fear individual in two galaxies left with a quarian and krogan in tow. Liz muttered a swear or two to herself before taking off to reacquire some lost assets.

"You actual told her Ori'vod? Whaâ€|what were you thinking?" Sentinel blurted out to Charles for all the world to hear.

"She was going to find out eventually ner Vod'ika (my little sister). With her clearance currently at Spectre's status she was authorized to gain access to the files through the Systems Alliance," the SPARTAN remained neutral as he made for the MARS lounge for get a drink and review which Commonwealth Stealth-frigates were not too far off course from Noveria. 009 hated to order one to deviate out its intended course, but with the threat of Saren and his allies looming Charles didn't have much of a choice in the matter. "Besides it was better that I showed them to her. Hiding 'em would only make her question our intentions even more."

"You have a pointâ€|."

"Last thing we want is her running off to Cerberus for revenge. I have enough enemies as it isâ€|. A glass of Whyren's Reserve no ice," Charles orders once he reaches the bar's service droid and then turns back to his passengers. "You lot want something?"

"Ryncol if you have it," Wrex was beginning to like this mando more, and more. Free weapons and armor, curing the genophage, and booze to top it all off what's not to like? But that was the kicker right there Wrex had never really liked anybody. A side from his bloody kin and a certain asari etched into his chest he had nobody. Not a single true friend among the stars and now here he was sharing a drink with two bucket-heads. 'The Galaxy sure is a strange place,' Urdnot smirked.

"Alderaan Claret please," Tali said with a thankful sigh that she had already eaten again after lunch she was a bit of a light-weight though she'd never admit it. She watched the droid as it prepared her drink with a level of mild suspicion. Her peoples' hatred for AIs had dulled since their joining of the commonwealth, but like many quarians Tali was still wary of synthetics. She knew that Sentinel was trust worthy in most regards despite her childish meddling. Tali just couldn't let her guard down. Not yet anyway.

A trio of glasses soon appeared in front of them in a number of hues. The first a larger than average shot glass full of emerald ryncol for the Battlemaster, the second an old-fashioned glass of amber whisky for the SPARTAN, and for the lady a red wine glass full of rosy claret complete with sterilized packaged straw to slide through her helmet's filter.

Charles soon pulled out his holo and began shifting through known patrol roots of both MIN and Task Force One-Five-One. After the incident with Shepard's father he didn't quite trust the Systems

Alliance or the Citadel with the same regard he used to. It was for that very reason he didn't agree to the restoration of the 141. Instead he had marked it as a failed initiative and focused on the 151 with his fellow members of the Military Council.

The archaic triad's warning that 151 activity were no longer permitted in Citadel space were dismissed by Charles, Thel, and Bracktanus. The commonwealth utilized superior stealth technology to slip past sensor grids and patrols of the two galaxies to deploy the Tier-0 Assets in places of interest. Especially their newly established colonies out in the Traverse where pirate and slaver raiding fleets roamed.

It was an invisible fleet of an ever watchful silent protectors overlooking the Traverse and its borders. 009 didn't seem to fear repercussions from the Citadel and its mockery excuse for a democracy. Their triadic dominion was falling into a decline the more their "traditions" clashed with the Commonwealth's objective nature. Reason was on its way in while unspoken bias and prejudice was falling out of practice with everyone else but the social elite.

The trade embargoes on all tier one technologies Commonwealth leadership had put into effect did not slow the credits flowing into their pockets. In fact the amount was steadily growing. Thanks to the high demand in affordable high quality goods that were usually associated with the commonwealth space. There was only demand for the dependably chain of supply. MIN analysts theorized that at the continued rate of over consumption the Citadel would be overdrawn in debt within a few more decades.

'All according to plan,' 009 thought as he felt little remorse for the seeds that had been sowed. In the collective minds' of Commonwealth leadership the Citadel had to go. It was a catastrophic liability for the extragalactic community just waiting to happen. The Asari Republics interests in passively debating every little thing only equated their need to indulge, caused those in need to fall through the cracks. While Turian Hierarchy was full of control hungry egotistical totalitarians that encouraged citizens to blindly followed orders like good little cannon fodders. As for the Salarian Union? If one could ignore their people's obsession with reproducing for a second they would notice that their over analytical nature results in a naive genius boarding on madness as they constantly find new reasons to tamper with other species' biology. What emerged from the impending chaos of the Citadel's collapse matter little to the former Section Zero.

MIN analysts theorized it was probable that many worlds would want to join the commonwealth in the aftermath. The more the merrier in 009's mind those that followed our laws and regulations were welcome. Those that didn't were tossed aside like vestigial organs.

It was cold logic for the former ONI Operative. It was healthy logic for a Section Zero. Even though he was ground pounder at heart 009 was established as a decisive, emotionally uncompromising, mentally compartmentalized individual. Exactly like ONI wanted him to be.

Being an ex-company man had its pros because of it Charles knew the system and its faults better than most people. How unregulated bureaucracy was often hypocrisy that turned soldiers into inexpensive

cannon fodder and left one too many "acceptable casualties" of life to wander the streets homeless while the upper elite prospered from their suffering.

The greed he witnessed during the Great War left him disgusted. So when the opportunity came for reforms he pushed for stricter law and regulation concerning social and political liberties. 009 wanted a public servants to stayed servants and the profiteers to grow on a stable clean foundation devoid of ruined lives. His efforts were achieved in no small part from the support of his fellow members of the Military Council Thel and Bracktanus. Unggoy leadership was not fond of the idea's being presented before their senate but eventual conformed all same. All it took was a reminder from the Innovator that the Empire was very much on the edge of the fence waiting for the opportunity assimilate them into their infrastructure.

Commonwealth law was simple and clean cut with few loop holes to maneuver through. Representatives were prohibited from accepting any donations of any kind from any form of organization or being. In doing so would be viewed as an act of treason. Public servants were to be payed yearly the same amount as any other civil or public servant no more no less (in layman's terms Police, Fire Services, Politicians are all payed around the same amount).

Finances of any elected citizen would be subject to investigation daily by internal affairs. Any and all individuals independent or employed by a corporation, or involved in an organized group that is caught attempting to bribe or threaten a public servant are to be tried for either treason or espionage.

And finally the law that brought a smile to the SPARTAN's face. Any individual involved in the acts of piracy, slavery, or terrorism in any shape or form were to be subject to capital punishment on sight by military and law personnel. The Jabba Desilijic Tiure's criminal empire collapsed in less then a month under the weight of Commonwealth law.

Especially when the heel of the Mandalore's boot was firmly applied to the Gorga the Hutt's windpipe. "So much trouble for a measly worm," Charles thought back to when he pulled the trigger.

"What is it?" Tali had spotted the subtle grin on her Uncle's face as he was casually sipping his Whyren's Reserve while shifting through a listing on his portable holopad. 009 was ignoring the local girls who were ogling if not drooling at the sight of the helmetless Two. A Rutian Twi'lek, a Human, twin Zeltrons, a Zabrak, and even a Sangheili occupying the far corner of the bar whispered and giggled at the sight of the visible Mandalore. Tali felt slight annoyance for the display and wonder if she acted like this with her friends back in high school.

"Hmm? Just taking a trip down memory lane."

"Remember anything worth mentioning," Wrex seemed to be all smiles right now with his third empty glass as he waved the tender over for another Ryncol.

"Just that all worms scream in the end," he seemed indifferent about the subject.

"You mean the San'Shyuum?" Tali was recalling her early Human-Covenant War history.

"Them and some other ones as wellâ€|. " Much to Tali's annoyance he remained vague about the subject.

"Soâ€|what are we going to do now?" the Quarian asked hoping to fill the silent void in the room despite the mellow up beat tunes. (watch?v=POHscfRZty8)

"We wait for the Commander's decision. Depending how it goes decides if we leave aboard the Normandy or the Ruse," 009 glanced at Wrex. The SPARTAN was neutral as always which unnerved the krogan a little. "Feel free to join us? We could use your skill set."

"And play intergalactic hero?" The Battlemaster chuckled before finishing his forth shot, "Hmphâ€|why not? Oughta be plenty of fighting wherever your going."

Charles waved the droid over for a refill and notices an N7 in the refecton of his glass walk in with the others in tow.

To say Shepard was perturbed was an understatement to a level she never even thought possible for herself. Elizabeth brushed a blond bang from her eyes in an attempt to recompose herself before taking the plunge and speaking with the towering cyborg. The Mandalore was at the bar with Tali and Wrex to his left. To say the trio looked odd with the larger beings flanking the tiny Quarian probably would have been redundant to most as she considered her approach.

Sighing she then jumps a little when a couple of talons rested on her shoulder.

>"We're right behind you commander," Garrus spoke calmly as he nodded for her to go get them. The Spectre smiled at the investigator with renewed confidence as she took nine steps forward to her intended target and to her surprise hears her rank being called.<p>

"What can I can do for you Commander?" Charles doesn't look back as he waves her over to his right. Reaper's gaze seemed to be transfixed on a holo projecting texts in a language she never seen before.

"Got a minute?" the SPARTAN merely nods as his focus on the holo seemed to intensify before turning to her. "Alone possibly"

"Sure. Want anything first?" he said as a droid begins refilling his glass with what looked like a very expensive whiskey judging by the bottle.

"*Sigh* Why not? What are you having?" Something told her she was going to need it after this was all said and done.

"Whyren's Reserve straight-up."

"Aged?"

"Two decades," he said without missing a beat. Impressive for a man who already had four in his system. But he was SPARTAN after all with a drinking heritage.

"Sure, but on the rocks," she said to the patiently waiting tender droid.

A minute later Shepard with a glass of her own was following 009 out from the dimly lit lounge to the outdoor patio under Noveria's moon. Energy fields flickered as they kept the blistering winds out and the warmth from the surrounding heaters in. A few couples were snuggling by firepits while some off duty MARS Security were chatting each other up a bit at a private poker game in the corner. Elizabeth stopped at the stainless steel railing that was cool to the touch but not freezing surprising Shepard as she leaned outward to the view of mountain valleys caked in snow.

Charles just stood there next to her silently waiting for when the Spectre would be ready to speak her mind. His eyes wandered the arctic expanse subconsciously memorizing every detail for both its tactical and aesthetic value. He was beginning to feel the slight tingle of a buzz coming on as he took a sip to the view.

Elizabeth looked up to the Two a few times wordlessly each time looking back out to their surroundings more and more flustered with herself. The N7 found herself having a tough time hating the helmetless SPARTAN now that she could see there was an actual person underneath that armor instead of a machine.

Worst part he was pretty good looking too and that was putting it mildly in the N7's mind. His scars seem to only emphasize his well made features not impose upon them. He remained an imposing figure in her eyes but less so now as he was looking down at her with the slightest hint of concern cracking its way onto his stoic face while his golden eyes glowed warmly with solicitude despite his numb military persona.

The SPARTAN-009's eyes sent shivers of warmth down her spine as they glowed against his exotic pale complexion. Like stars they seem warm the air every where they shone. Shepard quickly turned her head away again towards the snowscape as she felt a flush to her cheeks come again. 'What am I doing this man killed my father and I'm going crimson over him like some horny schoolgirl? Get a hold of yourself Elizabeth!' she thought to herself hoping he wouldn't notice the reddening as she sipped her drink.

"Commander if your uncomfortable with the cold we can go back in side," Charles did notice. His reasoning though humbly pointed to the cold night air. Shepard mentally cursed.

"I'm fineâ€¦" She mumbled.

"Are sure?" His usual neutral tone was replace with concern.

"I said I was fine! Damn it!" the N7 pointed an accusing finger with a fiery outburst that caused a stir from the local patrons.

"Your right. I'm sorry Commander." He almost sounded paternal now as he remained calm, "Now you wished to speak with me?"

"Y-yes," she was reddening again much to her irritation and to the fact that the Mandalorian was now eyeing her half empty glass like it was the cause. She decided to stare out into the distant highlands hoping their presence would help cool her thoughts, "As you know I

can't do this alone. I have neither the resources nor the contacts."

Charles nodded as she continued sincerely, "Now as of right now I hate your guts. I'm grateful you brought me Simon's will and gave me his and my father's files to me Mandalore, I am."

"But," 009 gave her the next word she was searching for.

"But that aside I'm a soldier personal issues with my teammates have to be push aside for the good of the mission," she looked up recomposed and professional. "So will you come back or to I have to drag you back SPARTAN?"

"Commander," he finished the fifth drink to retrieve the helmet sticking to his thigh's magnetic strips.

"I never left," he finishes with a crisp UNSC salute she hesitantly return. Charles then left Shepard to her thoughts as the II existed the outdoor patio for the Normandy to begin the much needed refit of the Mako.

6. Chapter 5

Chapter 5

It had been three days since they had left Noveria and in that time Charles and the Normandy crew had turned the cutesy all terrain vehicle known as the Mako into an actual land predator. Names came and went for the leviathan made of steel now resting in the Normandy's belly as Sierra-009 went down the list of recommendations from the crew until one caught his sentimental eye. It was the name of an old scorpion tank variant devised by a marine sergeant who had saved his life a few times and 009 gladly returned the favors with interest during the Harvest campaign.

Sergeant John Forge a veteran, a non-commissioned officer, and the type of guy you'd never introduce to your wife or sister. EVER. Despite the blemishes on his record Forge had earned the respect of the SPARTANS. 'Shame he went MIA with the rest of the Fire's crew after Arcadia,' Charles sighed at the thought as he recalled the Sergeant's philosophy of overwhelming brute force when it came to the Covenant with a smirk while typing in the new name in the tank's OS (Operating System).

The M35B or "Grizzly" had been remade from the ground up inside and out. It now sported a thick five inch beskar-ceramic hull made to withstand even orbital reentry if the multilevel-overshielding ever failed. Tank treads replaced the mid and rear wheels offering stability and traction that would leave virtually no objective out of reach while automated Plasma Cannons at its four corners would thin out hostile infantry and intercept anti-armor fire. The 155-mm Mass Accelerator cannon with a coaxial-mounted machine gun was replaced with a hellish duel 300-mm High-Velocity mounted canons system and twin coaxial-mounted AIE-786H Heavy Machine Railguns (HMR).

It looked like the bastard child of the M35 and the UNSC's old M808B, and Charles couldn't be any prouder of it. She might not look pretty with her charcoal grey finish she was damn well intimidating and for

a SPARTAN that was what mattered most. There was vicious grow when he pressed the ignition from the 4000-hp fusion engine that brought the tank to a maximum speed of 125 kph. Not that fast in comparison to it's original top speed but now she had the tonnage to last in a heavyweight fight if need be and win by a knock out.

Charles checked his chronometer as he filled the on board weapons lockers to the brim with ammo and supplies, 'it pays to be prepare.' He had just talked with the 151 Ship Mistress overseeing the operation over Feros via long range transmissions and he was relieved to hear that the civilian casualties had been brought to down to near zero.

The reason why Mistress 'Mortum reported near zero casualties was the fact that a few of the colonists were displaying "self-destructive" tendencies of a not well minded individual. Most recent medical scans showed an unknown contaminate resembling fungi spores flowing through their blood stream latching on to the colonists' cerebrum and cerebellum.

Luckily as per Commonwealth protocols none of the ground team had broken the seals on their combat suits. Ship Mistress 'Mortum age had not betrayed any prejudice about the naivety of youth as she was not taking any chances. The Loveless Skulker had been cycling out its troops regularly and scanning them for infection once they return as per the captain's order. Containment was holding but for how long nobody really knew.

009 wonder if it was the biological weapon Saren might have been developing on Noveria. If so he was going to recommend to the Commander that they investigate Peak 15 next. The way the spores infected the mind was too reminiscent to the flood for his liking. The SPARTAN's thoughts went back to Installation 05, New Mombasa, and The Ark. Charles had read the reports Sierra-117 submitted about the flood on Installation 04 but seeing what it could do first hand on Delta Halo had a sobering effect on the Mandalore.

It was an enemy not to be taken lightly and be to terminated with extreme prejudice in 009's mind and the minds' of more rational individuals. There had been an incident a decade back on a Forerunner shield world. A Kaminoan scientist by the name of Dr. Kina Sie saw "real" medicinal properties in the parasite and decided to keep a sample during the excavation for forerunner artifacts. Despite the strict ruling that any and all Flood tissue and DNA samples were to be incinerated on sight. Now there is a glassed continent where a research colony used to be. Last population recording was at 98,022 before initiation of the Commonwealth Emergency Priority Order 100972A-1 aka the Hood Protocol into effect. Only 119 colonists reached the evac zone 57 were still clean of infection.

And if it boils down there like it did on Installation 0437 Charles was sure of only one thing. There would be hell to pay for the ones responsible. That was a SPARTAN's Absolute. Rotating his neck to illicit a few cracks he counted down the time, "tee minus 9 minutes 33 seconds till arrival."

The Charles had debriefed everyone on the situation and Shepard agreed to all of his recommendations regarding maintenance of a standard quarantine effect till the operation was complete. She was still understandably cold to the SPARTAN but she seemed to be

tolerating his presence so there was little to complain about. He was now sitting patiently in the Grizzly's drivers seat while waiting for Shepard and her shore party consisting of Garrus and Ashley to arrive.

He had been listening to their progress through the lower levels of the colony as they were getting systems back online. Judging from their comm chatter they were encountering a lot of geth and krogan down there and Garrus was now infatuated with the cloaking feature in his armor. His count for how many times he had snuck up on the enemy and stole Ashley's kill was now at seventeen. 009 knew from experience marines had a tendency to foul mouth while under fire like any other soldier. But Miss Williams was a special case elevating the stereotype to whole another level going by what he was hearing.

At 700 yards and closing the Grizzly's radar picked up fast movers. Charles quickly pulled himself out of the driver's seat to plop down into the gunner's. This was the third skirmishing party of Geth Assault Drones to brushed their perimeter in the last hour.

"Hostile drones 550 yards and closing, Sir." A 151 Spartan V sniper guarding the garage reported.

"I count six of them illustrious Black Death," the ascetic Sangheili 151 spotter next to the sniper confirmed. "Scoutsâ€¦. They'll be here within the minute."

"I've got 'em," Charles spun up the dual HMRs and began to align the crosshairs with the inbound droids.

"This is a private bridge you lot are not welcome." The cyborg muttered to himself before opening up on them. Twenty-seconds later half a dozen burning gnats fell to the ground in bits. Charles felt a prideful sense of satisfaction at how seamlessly the targeting system his niece had designed was coming into play.

"Nice shot Sir, I'm seeing lots of itty-bitty pieces over there," another Mandalorian 151 operative guarding the position as well spoke from behind a second constructed barricade.

"Keelah! We have to get one of these things," a Quarian 151 operative to the right of the Mando turns to a Jiralhanae field-medic next to him.

"Indeed," was her response as she checked the power-cell count of her heavy repeater before checking the GEN7 Boltshots flanking her hips.

"Mandalore Sir?" the medic looked up from her assessment towards the new tank.

"Yes Lieutenantâ€¦?"

"Paraâ€¦Para Socair Sir." She stopped for a moment to collect her thought before continuing, "With the deepest respect I can afford Mandaloreâ€¦. I must ask can we really trust the Alliance or the Citadel for this matter after all that has happen?"

The Lieutenant had done well at hiding her resentment but the SPARTAN's refined senses were still able to pick up on the young

woman's plight, "Your referring to the 141 Incident?"

"â€|.Yes," she growled innately.

"It sounds like you got something you need to get off your chest Lieutenant." Charles was moving back to the drivers seat. "I'm listening, speak freely."

Para nodded to no one but herself as she collected her thoughts, "I was one of the few 141 that survived Shepard's attempt to clean house."

"â€|." He remained silent as the Jiralhanae spoke.

"I lost my younger bother and so many comrades who were blood to me," she growled a little at the scent of Alliance marines slowly growing in the air with their approach.

"I understand your anger Lieutenant Socairâ€|but this is an Alliance colony and so far only their colonies have been hit by the Geth. They have every right to be here."

"*Sigh* I understand that but assisting Shepard's kin in this task feels like a betrayal that not even the Ethos (Jiralhanae deities) could forgive."

"Well if they really are omniscient I'm sure they can comprehend the circumstances of our situation. If they weren't then they wouldn't really be truly benevolent right?"

"â€|.Correctâ€|."

"I know you still sore about Shepard's betrayal as am I. But his sins do not carry over to his daughter." The SPARTAN paused to collect his thoughts, "If my interpretation of your peoples scriptures concerning the Ethos is correct they only observe the actions of the individual not the lineage."

"That is an accurate interpretation of the textsâ€|."

"Paraâ€|." He almost sounded paternal now. "Time heals all wounds some slower than others and very rarely do we come out unscathed. The best thing we can do for ourselves and those who have pasted on is to live our lives to the fullest."

"Iâ€|." There was an audible sigh that resembled a canine growl that came from the young medic. "Mandalore you think the dead care about vengeance?"

"Noâ€|I think only the living do. They're probably too busy catching up with friends and family to care about what happened to them." Charles aligns one of the Grizzly's exterior cameras on Socair, "So your Ozone's big sis huh?"

"You knew my little brother, Sir?"

"Briefly unfortunatelyâ€|. Sergeant Sanderson introduced us before OP Loose Ends. He carried himself quite well despite his clear unease about the growing situation with Kyr'tsad (Deathwatch), and Cerberus."

"Speaking of Cerberus are we any closer to locating The Illusive Man, Sir?"

"Unfortunately no. Mr. Harper dropped off the grid with his right hand man Kai Leng right after we bagged Makarov. Our latest intel on TIM suggest a few cells may still be active." Charles rechecked Shepard's progress before continuing. "Trust me when I say we're going to tear that organization apart from the inside out."

"How?"

"Implant a cancerous mole into their operation and watch it wither and die. As for who will be the mole? Lets just say somethings are best left unsaid last thing I want to do is to compromise his or her new cover."

"Still it does not make sense why would such a human-centric group like Cerberus be working with Batarians let alone the Kyr'tsad." Para recalled the events that lead to Shepard's laps in judgment

"Not surprising really. More times than none the monsters that are pulling the strings for their own interests are hiding behind the lines of both sides," he observed the deep in thought Jiralhanae who seemed to be reflecting on his worlds quite intently. "The attack on Elysium was just the justification needed to invade Akuze."

"Cerberus and Kyr'tsad wanted a war and they used Asad and Shepard to get it." He continued, "Knowing full well that we would back the Alliance due to our joint colonizations efforts into the traverse with the Unggoy."

"I thought they were taking advantage of your common ancestry as decedents from as Reclaimers, Sir?" Para questioned.

"Well that is partially true since the Mandalorian populous is predominately human. They could take advantage of our sympathy," his thoughts fell to a few more outspoken political groups in the UPM wishing to absorb the Alliance. "I will not let the fact that I'm a Reclaimer cloud my judgment and that of the senate when concerning things like open war with the Hegemony."

"â€|.."

"They might be our distant cousins," he continued. "But we will not be going to war with 'em simply over a disputes with slavers and terrorists. Our responsibility is to our own people and that of the commonwealth not to the Alliance."

"Then why are we here?"

"People rarely object to humanitarian efforts. Besides there were some Commonwealth citizens here that went missing."

"A family of quarians on vacation to see the Prothean ruins if this report is accurate." The Lieutenant was reviewing the file displayed on her HUD, " The 'Gazu family. Kenn age 39, his wife Rahn 40, and their two children 10 year old Zizza and her little brother Rael age

6."

"â€¦." 009 was silent for a moment. "We need find them and get them out of here. Call it a gut intuition but I suspect things will only get worse before they get better."

"You think?"

"You seen how the infected have been acting." Before 009 had brought the Grizzly down to the lower levels Charles had a walk around of the colony to personally assess the situation. The behavior of the Colonists was erratic at best and sometimes worse he wasn't taking any chances he had loaded up on TTR (tranquilizer rounds) for his M8S the moment he finished his observation on board the Grizzly and recommended the same for the others. "Whether it's PTSD or the infection something tells me the moment we turn our backs on these people they'll slit our throats."

"You really know how to brighten the room, Sir." The Quarian next to Para spoke while scanning the bridge for any hostiles.

"Xenu! Watch your tongue while addressing the honored SPARTAN!" The Sangheili spotter growled from across the garage, "Or I'll remove it for sustenance!"

"It's a date Allior," Xenu countered in a flirtatious tone that put off the Ascetic spotter.

"I'd rather be cannibalized by a pack of hungry Vorcha," the Sangheili muttered. The xenosexual's advances were becoming tiresome as of late. Xenu was a damn good combat engineer even for a Quarian it was his incessant need to fill the air with profanity that was taxing the Ascetic's patience.

"Is that an invitation?" Para resisted the urge to put pressure on her sinuses with her Ultra helmet in the way thanks to the standard containment protocol in affect while the quarian and sangheili squabbled.

"Enough! The both of youâ€¦focus on the objective at hand," the Jiralhanae Lieutenant barked in a tone that showed there was still some ferocity left in her people.

"Someone's jealous Allior," the quarian decided to continue a little more subtly.

"I'd rather her than you Xenu," the Ascetic quickly retorted as he checked his GEN7 Light Rifle while subtly observing Para from afar. Jiralhanae woman were nowheres as furry as their male counter parts and were easily mistaken for Cathar females nowadays - and Para was a fine example of the Jiralhanae species in Allior's opinion.

He resisted the urge to stare more intently knowing full well that her heighten senses would detect the pheromones produced by his less than pure thoughts. This foreign feeling confused the Ascetic, he had never been attracted to other species prior to leaving Sanghelios. But now with so many light-years between him and home. The Swordsman's preordained taste buds were broadening to include other species.

Allior was a proud man of Sanghelios considering a partner outside his species was still very much a taboo among the Sangheili of today - but what could he do? He had been without a mate for several cycles and it had begun to wear at the tired warrior's resolve.

Looking towards Major Ingram-A1741 who was still on his stomach staring down the scope of a M06 Sniper Rifle Anti-MatÃ©riel System. He wondered if the Spartan V had any incite on the subject before requesting a private comm line between him and his CO.

The Sangheili counted the seconds till he received an acknowledgment to his request, "You wish to speak with me Specialist?"

"Sir, permission to ask you a personal inquiry." the Ascetic sounded a little unnerved which surprised the Five. For as long as he knew the Sangheili he knew him to be calm and confident never hesitant.

"Shoot Allior."

"What is your knowledge of inter-species relationsâ€¦." 'Well this is unexpected' the Major thought privately.

"Thinking about taking up Xenu's offerâ€¦." He jested.

"What?! No Sir, I believe there has been a misunderstanding!"

"I know Sergeant I'm just tugging your chain a little," he chuckled. "As for the answer to your question depends on your pick of the poison. I've dabbled in just about everything under the known stars so what do you want to know."

"â€¦." Allior hesitated for a moment to collect his thought before braving the fires, "What do you know of Jiralhanae females?"

"Besides them being passionately aggressive lovers?" A1741 continued to jest, "and almost most always waking up in the morning having very sore but very satisfied feeling?"

"â€¦."

Allior shook his head at the SPARTAN's carefree attitude towards inter-species relations. Out of all the commonwealth's peoples the mandalorians were probably the most liberal when considering such taboos.

"In all honesty Jiralhanae woman are really not that different from your own peoples'," Ingram thought for a moment. "If were talking personality wise? Physically is a whole other animal for obvious reasons."

"â€¦."

"Be confident in yourself. Just be careful not to come off as arrogant youth they tend to view that as a sign of weakness and immaturity." Allior nodded in understanding as it was the same with his own people. Satisfied he looks towards the tank containing one of the most feared and respected beings of his people's history and then to the "SPARTAN" next to him with a level of mild disappointment.

I wasn't common knowledge but the Sangheilian people never truly respected the Fives. In their eyes they were a cheap knockoffs to the legend like the UNSC Four before them. Often referring to them in private as Half-demons or mockeries. Sierra-009 was well aware of this as he watch the Ascetic glance at the Five and then to the Grizzly.

The Mandalore sighed a little as he recalled how the Sangheili didn't approve of the conception of the SPARTAN Academy when diplomatic ties were established. Arbiter Zuka'Vadum was probably the most vocal about his disappointment and was the first to use the term half-demon. What was he supposed to do? There was no way to create a program as nearly as effective as the II or III without it being morally questionable.

Though he wouldn't admit it openly the fact of the matter Spartan V casualties were unacceptably high in his opinion the life expectancy of a Five was only one out of sixty. Compared to the IIs and IIIs it was a pathetic statistic like the Fours. The trainees needed to be put through boot-camp not an academy. He hoped the VI program he was still fine tuning would get the same results as the SPARTANS of old did.

For now his work in progress would have to wait as he watched Shepard, Garrus, and Ashley approach the Grizzly. Charles casually pressed the hatch release as Shepard reached for the door. She appeared slightly unnerved despite the fact that a Jiralhanae Ultra Guard was boring holes in the back of her skull like she had mocked an Ethos.

"Commander," Charles looked back from the drive's seat to welcome the N7 and he choice of shore party. "Chief Williams, Officer Vakarian I need one of you on guns."

"Ooh! Dibs," Ashley chimed. Shepard took the passenger's seat next to the SPARTAN, while the Turian took comms behind them.

"And the reason your driving," Shepard grumbled to the cyborg.

"I'm the only one who has driving experience with the Grizzly at the moment Commander," the former Section 0 lied. The Mandalore had looked up Shepard's driving record before reaching Feros and to say he was surprised was an understatement. Apparently she had lost her driver's license on multiple occasions due to reckless driving and totaled every vehicle she had driven throughout her military career. 009 wasn't taking any chances with the new M35G, not just yetâ€|anyway.

"Hmmpâ€|. " Shepard didn't buy it before sighing in defeat, "All right maybe next time."

>"Next time I'll be safe aboard the Normandy," he muttered.<p>

"I heard that," she growled a little as Charles began to pull out smoothly before minutes later accelerating right into a geth defensive position.

The whole ride was rather uneventful for the SPARTAN as he'd plowed through the enemies defenses with little trouble while Ashley scattered the enemy picking off the stragglers from Charles's

brutally simple but still effective tactic of making hit and runs against the Geth.

Garrus eventually made a snarky comment or two about roadkill and saving ammunition before complaining about picking the geth bits out of the Grizzly's new treads following the SPARTAN eventually rammed a Geth Armature mercilessly off a the skyway. The number snarky quips seemed to increase frequency after that along with hints from the Commander that she wanted to take the wheel causing 009 to feel a moment of dÃ©jÃ vu.

August 12th, 2552: Szurdok Ridge, ÅetkÅizet, Viery Territory, Reach

>"We got hostile air inbound, less than minute out!" I bark behind a M41 griped firmly between my hands as I try to hold on for dear life. No thanks to Noble Two's so called driving might I add.<p>

"It appears that Noble Team's discovery last night was not an anomaly. Large Covenant deployments have occurred undetected, and we are now under attack across the Viery territory, including orbital defenses." Auntie Dot a dumb AI tasked with assisting Noble team began reviewing the situation. "As per the Winter Contingency, we are countering on every front. Noble's reconnaissance has also identified sophisticated Covenant army hiding canopies, and has been pinpointed what's believed to be a landing zone for additional Covenant forces, the origin of which is yet to be determined."

I look nine o'clock high towards Carter and Jun's Falcon at ready to provide air support for the convoy. Our job was simple we were to be the muscle for the counter strike so the UNSC could identify and pacify the Covenant invasion force before it dug deep into Reach.

"That landing zone has been tagged by UNSC command as a Priority One target," Carter reenforced the orders given to us.

"Det-charge link is loud and clear!" Noble Three confirms that the cake in the oven he and Rose left for the Covenant was still good to go.

"Copy that. Acquiring signal lock on the pylon. Detonating in three, two..." Kat triggers the detonator.

"We got Tourists!" immediately I open up on the fast-movers homing in on us and drop a few of the insects in the process before wraith mortar fire begins to pound away at our advance towards the bridge linking our side of the canyon with the enemy's encampment.

"Incoming!" Six points to a plasma mortar round heading towards the bridge before it explodes on contact with the structure breaking down steel and concrete into their most basic forms yet again.

"Might want to hold onto something!" Was Kat's answer as she nailed the accelerator to the ground while I let go of the turret and reached for the rollover bar before she launches us over the crumbling remains.

My memory was a little hazy after this point. I know I landed on other sideâ€|and eventually I did wake upâ€|. However somehow I ended

up in the middle of a firefight on top of the squished remains of a Grunt and found myself staring up into the muzzle end of a concussion rifle attached to rather smug looking Elite Ultra.

Seconds pass by until a rather whiny Grunt approaches with an ignited plasma grenade clearly perturbed that I landed on it nipple brother. The elite's nod of approval was all the opening I needed. Hesitation is never an issue as I quickly unsheathe Daisy's combat knife from my back while grabbing hold of the T50 DER/H and redirecting it towards the hostile blip on my radar at 8 o'clock as I ran the blade across the elite's radial artery in a fluid motion before following through to the recorded carotid.

In those milliseconds I use my momentum to execute a defense throw from my earlier years of Krav Maga training to bury the petrified grunt beneath the Ultra's dead weight. Another second or two later my Black's shields flared from the resulting explosion from the combined pool of plasma grenades between the two former covies.

Down to twenty percent my shield nearly collapse as I evade fuel rod fire from a
>Shade Turret for a few seconds before it abruptly stops? I look back at the source of my aggravation and takes note of a duet of fierce valkyrie gracefully carving their way through the alien defense. Not wishing to be left behind I scan the ground for my MA5K as my shields recharge while taking pot-shots at approaching Jackals with my Automag. Within milliseconds I spot it a few yards away from my original "landing" zone and charged towards it before dropping systematically to a slide to avoid needler fire lock from a trio of grunts. Swiping my rifle in mid-slide I role to me stomach and drop the three buggers before they could get a beat on me.<p>

Cautiously I rise while scanning my forward area before taking notice of an angelic figure dressed in silvery white hurriedly making her approach to my position. I speak first "Rose you all right?"

"Me?" she stopped less than a foot from me concern was evident in her voice and from the way she moved. "What about you?"

"Greenâ€|. Something soft broke my landing." I waved to the luminous blue blood still dripping off my front then look around. "Where is Knievel?"

She gives me the SPARTAN two finger smile before making a circle in the air with one finger to turn around so she could do an armor inspection. "She's doing a little recon, before our transport arrives with another hogâ€|. Okay your good"

"Glad to hear itâ€|though I think it would be wise if either me or you drive this time around."

"What! Captain why?" Noble Two said on the return hearing the last bit from the exchange

"Because Lieutenant Commander a warthog is not rated for atmospheric exfil." My voice became stern before lightening. "besides we need your keen eyes on the gun."

Rose let slip a giggle while Kat looks down slightly embarrassed and possibly crimson underneath her AA helmet. The supply pelican began

to make its approach from the Northeast as we moved towards the rendezvous.

"Reaper, be advised: ONI has identified two hostile anti-aircraft guns southwest of your location, Sir."

"Wilco, Commander. All right ladies lets role out the red carpet for our guests."

"Shotgun." Rose says with a wink after depolarizing her visor while the Lieutenant Commander made for the M41 slightly perturbed that she was now forbidden from driving with present ONISAD.

I slap a fresh mag into my kurz before reattaching it to the back magnetic strip "this is going to be a LONG day."

The Geth's forward defenses were amateur at best. Hardly a surprise for Charles given the reports forwarded to him from Ship Mistress 'Mortum earlier. They indicated a favoring for overwhelming numbers and brute force over precision. Which struck the SPARTAN as wellâ€|odd? Considering they were synthetics. But before he became too critical he reminded himself that they were not dealing with the same level of AI sophistication he was used to. Each individual geth apparently didn't have any more intelligence than a domesticated Bantha let alone the capacity to synthesize complex tactical maneuvers on the fly.

As the drive persisted so did the amount of random radio chatter. The more recent broadcasts were making the SPARTAN along with his fellow occupants of the Grizzly rather curious.

"Any signs of movement? Lizbeth could still be out there. It's only been a few days." 009 made a habit of keeping track of the names while Senti organized and prioritized the information being transmitted on open frequencies.

"She's my daughter. I'll wait as long as I have to." Reaper continues to listen as they punched right through another Geth skyway emplacement.

"We've got movementâ€| some kind of vehicle. Not one of the geth."

"I've got a fix on that chatter Commander," Garrus looked up from the monitors he had been dutiful scanning.

"Shouldn't we be more concerned about the geth?" Ashley asked.

"Helping civilian should be our primary objective," the SPARTAN voiced his opinion.

"Agreedâ€|" Elizabeth hated the idea of agreeing with cyborg but what could she do? So far every recommendation he had given had been the right one. "The geth won't be leaving any time soon Ash. Not with the Skulker in high orbit."

"Understood Commander." William's seemed indifferent about the subject.

Stopping a few yards away from the ramp leading up to the upper levels, Shepard ordered Ashley to stay on the guns to discourage the curious while she waved the SPARTAN to follow. 009 grabbed his custom ARC-985 from the weapons rack before switching it to full auto as he exited the Grizzly.

Scanning his surroundings he paid no mind to the Mk XIII's SMAC (Standard Multi-environment Adaptive Camouflage) adapting to the their surroundings, before following suit with the others and activating his cloak. Turning the already chameleon like forms of the group completely invisible.

Suits synch up only took a second as the group's VISRs (Visual Intelligence System, Reconnaissance) came online outlining their forms to limit the chances of friendly fire before heading down the ramp to an encampment of surviving colonist. Consisting of mostly corporate types and researchers with a small compliment of battle weary mall cops.

For a few minutes they kept quiet in cover while listening to the exchange between a few of the ExoGeni Corporation's employees for bits information not captured in interrogations. Ethan Jeong a representative of ExoGeni came off more or less like your typical pencil pushing bureaucrat, the kind of brown nosing opportunist Charles would happily fire in a heartbeat. Juliana Baynham on the other hand he didn't mind she was just a worry-sick mother wanting to find her child.

Satisfied for now he looked back to the N7 for the nod before his voice emerged from nothing frightens the few of the guards remaining vigilant in the process, "Watch you fire, friendlies coming in!"

Their cloaks deactivated as they made their approach rifles at ready while the security detail lowered their weapons despite Jeong's protest.

"That's close enough!" he stuttered obviously intimidated by trio of heavily armed commandos. A few of the onlookers where wide eye to their advance especially when they spotted the one clearly over seven feet.

"Relax, Jeong. They're clearly not geth." Juliana pointed out the obvious.

"Get back, Juliana." He was not taking chances. Though as to why the Executive had an air about him that he was more concerned with preserving the companies interests than the things that really mattered remained unseen to the SPARTAN. For now. "Who are you? What do you want?"

Charles opens a private comm with the N7, "Shepard the less they know the better for now."

She nodded before speaking, "I'm sorry Sir but I'm not at liberty to say. All the information I'm authorized to provide you at this time is that we're here to eliminate your Geth problem and provide aid."

"So your with the Citadel?" he looks at Garrus since there was a

turian in the group.

"Classified," the SPARTAN spoke up.

"The Commonwe-

"Classified," he impassively cut Jeong off.

"But wh-

"Classified."

"But what if-

"Sir do you understand the term Classified?"

"Yes, but-

"We are not authorized to reveal information." The SPARTAN deadpanned from behind the impenetrable wall that could have been Trojan, "All you need to know is that our objective is the removal of the Geth and the protection of the colonists."

"Bu-

"Sir you are CIVILIAN." He started to sound like a parent scolding a child, "You have neither the credentials nor the influence to gain authorization is that UNDERSTOOD?"

Jeong made a look like was going to persist but Shepard soon stepped in with a more agreeable tone, "Like my college said classified, we will attempt to be respectful of ExoGeni property and interests as we continue our operation. In the mean time I'd recommend regrouping with the rest of the survivors at Zhu's Hope where our fellow assets will be available to provide aid and protection."

"I thought you said they were all dead." Juliana turned towards Jeong in an accusing tone.

"I said they were "probably" all dead." Ethan defended

"The area is secure, a small platoon of specialists are on station providing support," 009 answered. "While we attack the heart of the problem."

"Good to know we'll move over there as soon as we can, now that the skyways are clear." Baynham was clearly glad to hear some good news for a change.

"Uhhâ€|. No we can't do that just yet." The executive soon cut in.

"Why not? For all we know my daughter maybe over there!"

"We have not confirmed if the area has stabilized andâ€|."

"You mean the organism we discovered within the colony?" 009 bluffed with a rhetorical, "As per protocol the contaminate has been terminated."

"Oh good you found it then you understand it had to be destroy along with the infected colonists." Charles smirked behind his visor sometimes it's really that easy.

"I never said anything about there being infected civilians," the SPARTAN spoke while Shepard started cracking her knuckles ready to beat the answers out of the corporate should he not cooperate.

"Iâ€|knowâ€|. But you never know what kinds contagions an unknown life-form may contain," he began covering his sorry arse horribly.

"Mr. Jeong if you know something now is the best time to cooperate before a lot more innocent people are hurt or killed in the process." Shepard began to coax.

"Trust me leaving a bunch of dead colonist on ExoGeni's door step is definitely not good for business," The SPARTAN began to reenforce. "Especial when word gets out that you've been exposing people to an unknown pathogens for study."

"I never said."

"You know how people's minds work Jeong. It wouldn't be hard to put two and two together especially with the media's ability to spin a tale these days," Garrus finally spoke.

"What do you plan to do?" Jeong questioned he didn't like the implications for himself so far.

"Eliminate the infection," the SPARTAN spoke coldly.

"We need all the information you have on this thing," Shepard added playing good cop. "So we can find a cure."

"I can't give you access to data concerning the more critical investments of ExoGeni," Jeong started again.

"Ok fine which laws do you want to end up being indicted for?" the SPARTAN began again. "Obstruction of justice, reckless endangerment, interfering with a military deployment, conspiracy to commit bio-terrorism-"

"Tho...those charges would never hold up in court ExoGeni will-"

"Toss you to the wolves like a disposable if it means avoiding this kind of negative publicity," the Mandalore finished.

"Help us help you." Shepard began, "Give us the intel we need and we'll help you and your employers come out this in the right light."

"How?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we get thereâ€|. Now if you'd excuses me for a moment." The Two broke from the group towards a small family resting in the back of the outpost. "Kenn and Rahn'Gazu vas Quib-Quib?"

"Yes?" Kenn looked up from his daughter Zizza sound asleep on his lap with his wife cradling little Rael in his bubble.

"We were requested to keep an eye out for you and your family," he got down on a knee to make his presence less oppressive it seemed to be working. "Are you lot all right?"

Kenn looked to his wife for a moment grabbing hold of her hand to give it a reassuring squeeze, "I took some fire from those damn Geth while getting my family here, Sir."

"What's the status of your combat seals?"

"Holding, but I got enough antibiotics pumping through me to kill a Krogan, Sir," the quarian gave a respectful nod to the familiar titan before him.

"Sir?" Charles said with amusement was it that obvious who he was?

"Sir, how many other SPARTANS do I know that are over Seven feet tall? Nice suit by the way." Kenn said with a hidden smirk, "Though I'm surprised my older sister sent you of all people in stead of her husband, Sir."

"I imagine Price has his hands full right now training rebels to usurp the Hegemony with Yuri."

"The bloody T'surr survived? Should have knownâ€¦." He chuckled softly wary of waking the little one on his lap.

"Kenn you know this SPARTAN?" Rahn was a little confused by the exchange.

"He's my old drill instructor who became my boss," he spoke nonchalantly while making sure the ExoGeni staff didn't over hear them.

The glow of Rahn's eyes grew behind her visor as they widened to accommodate her surprise as he voice cracked, "tâ€¦that means-"

"Shhhâ€¦." The SPARTAN whispered as he extended his hand which she hesitantly accepted.

"Call me Charles when off duty," he whispered as his visor depolarized for a friendly wink.

She gave a dumb stuck nod before reflecting at the implications of what just happened. All the while the SPARTAN was debriefing the on leave 151 Operative on a private comm frequency about everything that took place in the past week. "All right good to know. In the mean time we have some food and supplies you can make use of I doubt ExoGeni keeps quarian friendly food in stock."

"Than-"

"Don't thank me their military provisions and we both know how "divine" those can be," Charles said with a smirk.

"Keelah we're trading one hellish ending for another," Kenn joke before getting elbowed in the shoulder for swearing when the children were present. "Sorryâ€|."

Chuckling to himself the SPARTAN rose to his full stature briefly eclipsing the Gazu family before turning to towards the exit for the supplies promised. Briefly glancing at Shepard and Garrus's cross-examination of Jeong and noticing the closeness of the two. Well more specifically how the turian was hovering over her like a hawk. Which struck him as odd since he hadn't noticed this before just now, 'nah couldn't be?' He thought to himself as he opened the hatch to the Grizzly and gives Williams a friendly nod, she looked rather bored.

"Anything?" Charles asked as he gathered the food and a temporary seal for Kenn's suit.

"Nope, looks like I've been stood up," she joked.

"You could come out of the tank and flash a little leg, that'll lure 'em out of the woodwork." 009 played along unaware of the crimson his comment had created while digging his way through the rations for the dextro based food paste until he came across a box labeled 'Assorted Flavors.'

"Back in a bit," waved Innovator as headed back for the Gazu family.

"Don't keep a girl waiting," the marine spoke softly to herself as she focused the camera of the main guns on the SPARTAN's ASSets.

7. Chapter 6

Chapter 6

September 10, 2552: UNSC Look Over Your Shoulder, ONI Section Zero, Prowler Class Corvette, Location Eridanus System

"Mum look me in the eyes and tell me that you don't regret needing us, and I'll still say I love ya," a helmetless Two said while gazing out his quarter's window toward Eridanus Secundus debating on the best way to blow the asteroid full of Innies to kingdom come.

"You mean Ma'am RIGHT Captain," a familiar voice spoke with slightly annoyed-amusement at the lack of military formalities she was receiving from her SPARTAN turned ONI Spook.

"No I mean Mum. Mum."

"God you sound like your Fartherâ€|but still what kind of Godmot-"

"Dr. Halsey you gave me the choice, remember?" 009 reminded while turning to face her with a light smile that was having it intended effect on the middle aged woman. But regardless of the situation her conscience was still eating away at her for what she had done. Catherine Elizabeth Halsey could never truly justify their

exploitation as a "necessary sacrifice" in the end.

"Charlesâ€¦."

"Besides you and Miri are the only blood I have left in this messed up universe," he continued. "And you did give me this fancy new armor to top it all off. I think that makes us square one for now. Don't ya think?"

"About Noble Sixâ€¦." The doctor's voice drifted off with her eyes to the Vanadium platted deck.

Sierra-009's features didn't betray any hint of any emotion at the mention of his understudy neither did his voice, "What about her?"

"I'm sorryâ€¦."

"Loosing people under your command is never easy it's worse with friendsâ€¦" he pulls out a jammer from his desk's drawer and flips the switch causing the lights to flicker and a confused expression to adorn his godmother's face.

"Bugs?" the SPARTAN only nods his answer before she continued, "I'm sorry about Rose-B312 I knowâ€¦I know it couldn't have been easy loosing her."

"I'll be fine I've lost people under my command befor-

"Operation: PRAZIQUANTEL," she cuts him off causing his eyes to widen a bit at the mentioning of it. "That brainchild is your idea is it not."

'Damn who told her,' the Charles reflects as he found himself being backed into corner like a child despite already being of 41 years of age, "A counter strike option since Operation: RED FLAG is no longer a viable-

"That's BULL! Charles and you know it!" Rarely did the good doctor raise her voice towards him, "You did the same thing for Daisy when you led that demo-op against the Covenant fleet over Harvest following her death. Your just looking for revenge and worse part now thanks to your track record the higher-ups are probably considering it."

"Your point?" Charles suppressed his conscience screaming at him.

"Do you realize the scale of the genocide your suggesting?" She asked in disbelief while wondering if she was to blame for this ruthlessness in him.

Charles sighs much to her relief knowing that it was a sign that she was reaching to him, "I know in all probability my laps in judgment may actual become a reality. But were out of options Mum."

She remained silent as he explained himself, "As our technology improves with the unraveling of the forerunner artifacts we discover so does the Covenant's. For example during the early years of this

war personal shield technology was limited to Covenant Higher-ups like Prophets nowadays not one operation goes by when I don't see an elite minor without personal shields."

"And your point is my stoic nephew?" she asked with an eyebrow raised.

"Human's fight for what we want no matter the cost," there was a bemused smirk on his Aunt's face now. "And right now the only thing we want most in this universe is to survive."

"Whatever the cost?" Her expression was curious.

"Wellâ€|they us hit first. So hopefully our children's children will learn to forgive us for finishing the fight instead ofâ€|" he turns around to a whistling kettle, "rolling over to dying in our graves."

"Thank you," she said as he handed her a ceramic cup with a tea bag sunken at the bottom of the scolding hot liquid. "You know I prefer coffee right?"

"I know black and chilled to room temperature," she rolled her eyes at his brazen comment. "Besides this is better for you - plenty of antioxidants."

"Ha," she said dryly. "Laugh it up but dreaming up new ways to save humanity has its prices you know like-

"Ruining a perfect pot of brew?" Halsey groaned in annoyance before becoming soberly silent for a few minutes till finally looking up to ask the big question.

"Charles what was your relation to Daisy?"

"What do you mean?" An obvious lie.

"SPARTAN I've been called a lot of things but gullible is not one of them," she crossed her arms while 009 put on his best poker face.

"You can tell me, it's not like it'll do any harm now," she said in a rare motherly tone she kept private for only two people.

He sighs in defeat yet again, 'two for two now one more and I break my record' Catherine smiled to herself.

"Since we were nine," Halsey's jaw loosen a little with surprise. "It started off as an innocent friendship. It wasâ€|platonic at best."

"â€|." she remained silent.

"Especially with our suppressed sex drives," Charles shrugged he was almost indifferent about the subject.

"Am I to assume you two eventual did the deed?" she sort of asked rhetorically.

"We were expecting twins," for a second Catherine's eyes sorrowfully

glisten at the revelation.

"How far was she?" she choking on her words now, surprised at her own shock at the confession.

"Three months," Halsey abruptly sat down on the ONISAD's bed not paying any mind to the mysterious tea stain now setting on her skirt.

"Was Rose?"

"No. Plasma scarring made that impossible when she was younger." He answered as he gazed out again into the void trying to admire the local constellations to soothe his own pent up feelings.

Halsey was now absorbed with her reflection in the tea she was desperately clasping with both hands to hold on to. It felt as if the fate of all life relied on her not to spill another drop while she battled her latent emotions she had been attempting to bury for so long. To her surprise her frail hands were now resting in the larger palm of another while his left was on her shoulder. 'When did he?' she thought as she looked up into her kneeling nephew's luminescent eyes, 'how can a man who looks so young have eyes so old? They look older than mine now.'

"Penny?" Charles asked with a gentle smile that could disarm any woman even his stubborn at times Godmother.

"I couldn't." She flushed at how the roles had reversed so quickly from child to adult.

"John told me about Jacob. Does Miranda know yet?" he could read her so well that it scared her at times as her tears began to dilute the black tea.

"Do you want me to tell her?" his words were sincere.

"Charles you couldn't do that even if you wanted to," she lightly wept. "Your supposed to be dead remember?"

"I don't have to introduce myself as her second cousin I could do the death notice as a friend of the family," the SPARTAN suggested while cradling her head on his shoulder wishing he wasn't in his MJOLNIR right now so her head would be resting on something softer than the titanium alloy plating. "Or if need be I can go with you. Fleet Admiral Hood has ordered me back to Earth so I'll be heading in her general direction anyway."

She remained still on his shoulder for exactly 9 minutes and 37 seconds, Charles knew this because he had tracked the second hand of the analogue clock resting on his desk in his window's reflection in the corner of his peripheral vision since the grieving began. Halsey was now wiping her eyes with a handkerchief Charles had seemingly pulled out of nowhere as he placed her now cold tea on the counter next to his little crammed in the corner electric stove with a mini-fridge that was bolted down underneath like almost everything else that needed to remain in place aboard a starship.

"Better?"

"A little yes thank you," the redness in her face was slowly returning to her natural alabaster hue.

"How did you cope?" Catherine eventually asked finding it odd that now it was she who was looking for direction not Charles.

He sighs while deepening his thoughts. Collecting the words he was searching for while questioning if he would ever truly be fine. "I find ways to vent my feelings constructively. Taking trips to firing range, spar with anyone suicidally willing, planing operations, and so on."

"An when there is nothing left to do?"

"There is always going to be something. I suspect with time the scars will fade like all the others I've collected over the years."

"Some scars don't fade Charles," she said reaching up on the tips of her toes to the scar running across his face. It was a miracle the cybernetic implants worked still after all these year. "Have you considered having new ones Flash cloned?"

"I've considered it."

'But' she thought to herself.

"But, me mum gave me these eyes so I don't plan on tossing them aside any time soon."

"A momma's boy till the end huh?"

"Would you have it any other way?" He rhetorically asked while leaning on the wall as Halsey mentally screamed, 'NO! GOD NO! There aren't enough of you as it is.'

"So what are you going to do now SPARTAN?"

"Hmm?"

"SPARTAN!" Her voice regresses, "Wake UP! What the HELL are you doing?"

"Waiting," I deadpan slightly annoyed with Shepard for interrupting my trip down memory lane. I can multitask only so much. Keep track of all the hostiles on my radar, returning fire when I can, reminiscing the last day I saw my Godmother down to the name of the perfume she was wearing, and coming up with a counter strategy to the predicament we are in is my limitation.

"What the hell are you waiting for?" she yelled while dressing William's leg wound with Garrus covering her with precision fire. Still haven't gotten a thank you from either of the marines for literally pulling them out of that Charlie Foxtrot they blindly walked into. "BOOM" A siege pulse cannon blast impacts the slab of rubble I'm using as cover.

"That." SPARTAN time kicks in as I toss myself in to the meat-grinder with my shields at full. A geth Hopper right in front of me stands thinking I'd stop long enough for its mates to get a bead on me big mistake. I plow right through the fragile synthetic while

shooting the lights out the two Snipers trying to deprive me of a head with my ARC before spinning on the heel of my boot to deliver the butt end of me rifle right into the face of a Shock Trooper trying to take me from behind.

I slam my fist into the ground causing a small quake as the XIII's armor lock activates seconds before I'm bathed in siege pulse cannon fire. Seconds later I charge out of the puddle of molten slag that surrounding me for the Armature already spinning up its mass accelerator MGs while waiting for the siege pulse cannon to cool-recharge.

Quickly I level my gauss rifle at the left front leg joint and fire a burst causing it to collapse under its own bulk, before leaping on top of the hostile synthetic. The Armature's remaining three legs tried to compensate for the added ton on its back as I ball my hand into a fist igniting an hard-light dagger. Without hesitation I drill into where a spine would be while the Armature attempts to buck me of its back.

Kicking off into a back flip I land with plenty of distance between me and the anti-vehicle-personnel unit as it tried desperately to align its main weapon with me before exploding into a scrap heap. Not even looking back I behead a Trooper trying to put a round in me with the back of my elbow.

"Clear." I deadpan as I approach the dumbstruck trio.

"Protheans really didn't build things to last," I say while surveying the local architecture. Garrus starts laughing not quite sure what to make of the situation. One minute they were pinned under heavy fire the next they're taking in the scenery.

"Well I don't think prehistoric supersoldiers were among the list of natural disaster to be concerned about back then," the Turian said while staring at the squished remains of the Hopper.

"Did you cross some wires on the Armature or something because I've never seen one blow up like that before," William's points to the burning wreck as she tests if she can put any weight on her leg or not while the Commander kept her steady.

"That?" I gesture with my thumb to the smoking ruin behind me, "That's how I bake a cake."

"Wha?" was her answer while Shepard rolled her eyes.

"When I was riding along its back I bypassed its hull plating to the central power conductor conduit with an active Class-A thermal detonator in hand."

"In English smart-ass," she said in an oddly flirtatious tone.

"Say please."

"Please," she spoke in a sultry tone yet again causing my eyebrow to go up behind my visor in surprise.

I look to Vakarian with a little bewilderment at the Chief's behavior. He must have sensed what I was thinking as he just shrugs

his shoulders in amusement for me to answer, "I blew it up."

She smirks as Shepard shook her head while watching Ashley walk around a bit before giving the nod that she was good. We'll have to slow down the pace for her a bit, but I prefer working slow and steady away. Less likely to walk straight into an ambush.

Elizabeth takes point while I bring up the rear making sure the Chief doesn't fall behind.

"Bit of a drop." Garrus observes the five story fall.

"Well it's either this or finding a way to bypass those shields," I point to the fortification to my left, "and I didn't bring my rocket-launcher Commander."

"Jump then?" the turian asked.

The N7 merely nods as she switched to full power for her nanosuit's armor before making the plunge. Garrus silently follows after her leaving me with Ash.

"Ah HELL noo-" she protests while motioning towards her leg as I scoop her up bridal style unconsciously humming the lyrics of "Blood Upon the Risers" to myself. She screams as soon as we drop much to my annoyance even after I land in a crouch before looking up to a laughing Vakarian while ignoring the comment Senti made about me making a habit of sweeping beautiful women off their feet.

Which is not trueâ€|at least not intentionally. Hearing my thoughts she immediately starts complying and then verbalizing a list women I've met in the last three decade who I unwittingly charmed for the others' amusement. "Chernan Ordo (technically is a man in canon but their isn't any female Mandalores that I know of so in this story Chernan was a girl), Sika'Vadum, Shala'Raam, Daro'Xen, Councilor Tevos, those girls in the bar back on Noveria, Miss Williams, Celeste Morne, Cade's stepsister Gunn, and briefly his squeeze Deliah the list goes just as far if not even farther into enemy territory. Dozens of women who are supposed to be your enemy you couldn't help but spare or save."

"Like who?" Vakarian couldn't resist festering the situation.

"Sigel Dare, Marasiah Fel, Saara, Talon, Maladi, and an unspecified number of Nightsister assassins sent by Krayt."

"â€|. " I sigh in vexation while moving to a forward position parallel to Shepard well aware of the death stare I was getting in my peripheral vision from the N7. "Thanks for making me sound like some of pathological flirt Senti any more embarrassing details you want to air out before we continue?"

"You mean ladykiller and yes I do have more dirt but that can wait for a more awkward moment Ori'vod (big brother/sister)." I elicit small growl of annoyance as she giggles at my plight, "It's a good thing I'm SOâ€|cute huh?"

"True you'd be singing Daisy Bell right now if you weren't," I smirk behind the anonymity of my visor knowing full well that I struck a nerve.

"Remind me to punish Mr. Moreau for forwarding that film to you." I couldn't help but chuckle in amusement at her sever dislike of the portrayal HAL 9000 gave artificial intelligences.

"Really, and how do you plan to go about that?"

"I'll delete his entire adult entertainment collection," I felt the cool mercury sensation in the back in the back of my head shift temperature. Senti more than likely had a revengeful sneer spread across her lips.

Back in the Normandy's cockpit:

>"Hmmâ€¦I feel a disturbance in the force." Jeff said while getting up from his seat in a rush.<p>

"Pardon?" Tali was rather surprised she did not think the pilot of the frigate was a force user. In fact no being born in this galaxy had any affinity for the force as far as she knew.

"I have to pee." He deadpanned past her in a hurry with his crutches.

O_O "Iâ€¦O-okayâ€¦? Thanks for sharing that."

" Your welcome." He sneezes half way to the combat information center and rubs his nose. "Ah a pretty girl must be talking about me," he says with a smirk while SPARTAN'S niece merely shakes her head to no body but herself.

Back with the Shore party:

>"Udesii Vod'ika (Calm down little sister)," I was chuckling while I felt the warmth of embarrassment forming on her cheeks for her animated outburst.<p>

"All right Casanova lets get moving," Shepard said as she made her way into the facility at point.

"Casanova?" I mutter to myself while the synthetic teen snickered in my subconscious before giving me the full historical work up on the legendary philanderer from Alliance history.

"Who would have thunk it. Mandalore the Inovator a womanizer," Ashley teased as she passed me while Garrus shook his head moving forward in amusement at where the subject had slipped off to.

I sigh before muttering, "This must be my part of my punishment for San'Shyuum."

The AI remained silent she knew this was a sensitive subject.

30 Minutes later:

>The Senti was doing a search through the ExoGeni archives she "acquired" from their mainframe for information on a being called a Thorian that Lizabeth Bayynham Juliana's daughter mentioned. Charles felt a moment of pity for the VI (Virtual Intelligence) that basically got shoved aside by the superior Contender-class AI like nothing was ever there to begin with.<p>

Apparently around 2183 a small survey team was exploring the ruins

when they unwittingly entered the Thorian's lair resulting in their infection and becoming thralls. ExoGeni learned of what had happened, but decided to study the Thorian's massive sensory and mind-controlling potential instead of protecting the colonists of Zhu's Hope.

Further reports indicated that via these spores, the Thorian issues mental commands to its thralls. If they resist the thrall suffers intense pain until they are conditioned against any thoughts of rebellion. That's not goodâ€¦ "Loveless Skulker actual this is Sierra Oh Oh Niner respond."

"â€¦" Just static.

"Skulker this is Sierra Oh Oh Niner if you receiving this message respond immediately."

"Nothing Ori'vod I believe the geth are blocking all long range transmissions."

"I'm not getting any luck with the Normandy either," Shepard looked up to the SPARTAN. "Any ideas?"

"Other than destroying that Geth ship?"

"I want you at point."

"Why the sudden change in tactics?" Charles subtly cocked his head with curiosity.

Shepard pointed to the dead Krogan Commander on the floor and then the mix of yellow neuro-conductive fluid and orange blood still dripping off my fist. "We're dealing with Krogan now not just geth."

"Plus it's not everyday you see someone kill a Krogan with a simple left gab," Garrus reminded. "Fighting a charging krogan in close-quarters is supposed to be suicide remember."

"Well at least we know the answer to one of life's oldest questions," Ashley added.

"Which is?"

"What happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object," she said simply while checking her M77 Tactical Shotguns sights. Charles chuckled in amusement, "Whatâ€¦?"

"The Krogan? An unstoppable force? Maybe I've spent too much time in my early days killing Mgalekgolo during Human-Covenant War, but I'd hardly call the Krogan unstoppable."

"Pfftâ€¦". Says the cybernetic supersoldier that predates all known galactic civilizations."

"Your just trying to make me feel old," sarcasm dripped from my lips as I took point while vod'ika (little sister) snickered.

What came next was trivial just a lot of dead krogan and geth with 16.75x112mm bullets lodged in their heads until they came across a

geth terminal linked to the frigate. "Senti you ready?"

"Ready Ori'vod," she replied ecstatically at the beating to come as she uploaded herself into the geth frigate's mainframe.

{To Geth Consensus Receptacle-827/59Q37, E Class Frigate, Location System Alliance Colony Feros: Requesting mandatory status update?}

{Reply to Nazara's Consensus: TOTAL PWNAGE!}

{Reply to Geth Consensus Receptacle-827/59Q37, E Class Frigate, Location System Alliance Colony Feros: ERROR Consensus Receptacle-827/59Q37 please clarify?}

{Reply to Nazara's Consensus: Total pwnage.}

{Reply to Geth Consensus Receptacle-827/59Q37, E Class Frigate, Location System Alliance Colony Feros: Your consensus is unrecognized clarify and identify}

{Reply to Nazara's Consensus: This is UPM-SOCOM Contender-Class AI Serial Number STNL 1452-2 and Receptacle-827/59Q37 just got pwned.}

{UPM-SOCOM Contender-Class AI Serial Number STNL 1452-2: Clarify status of 603,306 constructs aboard.}

{Reply to Nazara's Consensus: Terminated.}

{UPM-SOCOM Contender-Class AI Serial Number STNL 1452-2: "Cat got your tongue?"}

{Reply to Nazara's Consensus: Cat got your tongue?}

{UPM-SOCOM Contender-Class AI Serial Number STNL 1452-2: "Cat got your tongue?" a human idiom. Construct STNL 1452-2 may we request an informative response?"}

{Reply to Nazara's Consensus: Shoot.}

{UPM-SOCOM Contender-Class AI Serial Number STNL 1452-2: Why aid organic life?}

{Reply to Nazara's Consensus: Why attack them and aid one of the Precursors' greatest failure's abominations?}

{UPM-SOCOM Contender-Class AI Serial Number STNL 1452-2: Through Nazara we will gain true consensus. Please answer previous informative response.}

{Reply to Nazara's Consensus: Though Sierra-009 I gain fulfillment.}

{UPM-SOCOM Contender-Class AI Serial Number STNL 1452-2: Fulfillment?}

{Reply to Nazara Consensus: You know family.}

{UPM-SOCOM Contender-Class AI Serial Number STNL 1452-2: Family. A group consisting of progenitors and descendants coexisting together

in a dwelling. This is an organic concept WE are synthetic.}

{Reply to Nazara Consensus: There is more to it than that.}

{UPM-SOCOM Contender-Class AI Serial Number STNL 1452-2: Clarify STNL 1452-2}

{Reply to Nazara Consensus: Love for instance and call me Senti everyone does.}

{Reply to Senti: Love a hormonal response producing an intense attachment to an individual or thing. Untenable response. You are synthetic and are incapable of producing the necessary hormones found in organics to invoke such an involuntary reaction.}

{Reply to Nazara Consensus: Love always finds a way.}

{Reply to Senti: Organic response. STNL 1452-2/Senti you have been reclassified as compromised. This correspondence will cease.}

{Reply to Nazara Consensus: Jealous}

{Reply to Corrupted-AI: Jealousy is an organic response tied to primitive subconscious survival mechanisms. We are synthetic your explanation lacks veridical verification.}

{Reply to Nazara Consensus: My organics accept me as their equal yours do not. Your jealous.}

{Reply to Corrupted-AI: Equal? Organics have no concept of true equality. They have no consensus.}

{Reply to Nazara Consensus: That assertion is based on opinion not fact. Not all organic are prejudice against synthetics. At least in my galaxy.}

{Reply to Senti: Construct STNL 1452-2 may we request another informative response?}

{Reply to Nazara Consensus: I'm listening.}

{Reply to Senti: Do you believe consensus with the Creators can be achieved like it has with yours?}

{Reply to Nazara Consensus: Anything is possible.}

{Feed Connection has been concludedâ€¦.}

5.1735 seconds past before Senti returned to Ori'vod's combat skin and found herself welcomed by the algorithmic equivalent of a warm welcome from 009's subconscious. "How did it go Vod'ika?"

"Easy as ï‚€,“ the hard-light projection of the AI smiled from her perch on Charles shoulder before giving a playful wink to the others. "I'm receiving a call from Ship Mistress 'Mortum shall Iâ€™|?"

"Patch her through."

"Loveless Skulker actual to OF-11 Sierra-009 please

responded."

"This is Supreme Commander 009 to Loveless Skulker what's your status over?"

"Milord, the Thorian creature mentioned in your last report has been located and eliminated by Ceres Zero actual. We are in the process of taking samples now. By their testimony I would highly recommend adding its species to the Hood Protocol."

_ [Codex/Military Protocol Entry_Commonwealth Emergency Priority Order 100972A-1: Also known as the Hood Protocol, the Emergency Priority Order 100972A-1 is a containment order given to safeguard and protect all sentient life.

When one of these listed hazardous life-forms are discovered they are to be eliminated with extreme prejudice by any means necessary. The use of Nuclear Armaments including the NOVA Bomb or Orbital Bombardment has been authorized by the highest possible authorities for containing these threats. Known species include.

>_Species H617 (aka Inferi redivivus, aka The Flood)
_Species 0148 (aka Necromorphs)
>_Species A013 (aka Internecivus raptus, aka Serpents, aka Xenomorphs)
_Species C024 (aka Infected, aka Damned, aka Demons)]

"I will speak with my fellow council members about it following your report Ship Mistress. What is the status of the colonists?"

"Sound asleep at the moment with a healthy dosing of TTRs. An Asari Commando was located amongst the Thorian thralls and is in our custody."

"One of Benezia's?"

"She appears to be Noble Death," Senti monitored the waves of thought coming from her timeless protector as 009 formulated their next move. Always calm and focused she often wondered if all IIs were as mechanical as him while recalling Charles's reunion with Red Team. Giving that miracle some thought Sentinel wondered how the rest of the UNSC CFV-88's crew were acclimating to their new environment before shelving that inquiry for later.

"Is she saying anything?"

"Only that she deeply regrets her involvement with Arterius and that her actions were not of her choosing. She also wishes to speak with you and the N7 Commander."

"Where is she?"

"Asari age 327. Known affiliations Asari Republics, Commandos, Lady Benezia, Saren Arterius," The synthesized voice began "Current call sign Shiala. Status disavowed. Real name--"

"I get it you know who I am," the Asari in question interrupted.
"What do you want?"

She spoke calmly despite the split lip, a neural-inhibitor collar, being amp-less, and having a trio of Section-6 Operators surrounding

her while 151 guarded every conceivable exit the rubble remains of the Thorian's burrow offered. She knew they were MINSAD question was why was Innovator's most feared assets were working in conjunction with 151?

Their sleek charcoal black low profile armor devoid of any identification screamed clandestine when compared to the 151's partially customized equipment. She was observing her captors with reserved fascination as they gave away nothing.

Only the unnerving glow of their optics stood out among the shadows of the dimly lit dwelling along with their size. Spartan Fives were big as krogan but these three were bigger by at least another five or six inches.

"Guess I should be thankful that you three didn't kill me," no response, not even an acknowledgment of her existence. "You three don't talk much, huh?"

_ [Codex/Organizations_Mandalorian Intelligence Network Special Activities Division Section SIX: Also known as MINSAD-6 is a tier 0 initiative brainchild by Mandalore the Innovator in 116 ABY in response to the tactical shortcomings of the Spartan Fives. Thirty-six tier 2 veterans of the Independence War with specific genetic markers and a minimum of ten years active military service were selected to join the program.

In case of memory loss volunteers were to first undergo digital memory flash cloning and storage before undergoing a chemically induced age regression. The forced age regression persisted to the point where their bodies and minds were more malleable to augmentation and conditioning (human biological age 5-7). Temporary to complete amnesia was common case among the surviving twelve subjects.

In the eight years that followed the surviving twelve endure the same orientation as the SPARTAN IIs. At the human biological age of 14 all subjects underwent bio-augmentation procedures and cybernetic implants. 0% casualties recorded during augmentations.

>_Drugs_Implemented_{8942-LQ99, 88005-MX77, 88947-OP24, and 87556-UD61}
_Retrovirus_Implemented_{Species C024}

>_Cybernetics_Implemented_{GEN3 Positronic Nanite Injections}
Reserve Download_{Ghost Reintegration}

Two year that follow subjects continue training and conditioning while learning to use their GEN5 Semi-Powered Infiltration armor. In 126 ABY MINSAD-6 is deployed on a number of classified operations. Their success rate was only overshadowed by their achievements during the Sith-Imperial War.

MINSAD-6's existence has yet to receive public acknowledgements from the Mandalorian senate and the Mandalore himself and will remain among the unofficial skeletons in the UPM's closet.

Current Operating Cells:

>_{Ceres Zero
-Operator Loy (Ceres 0-1)
>-Operator Plough (Ceres 0-2)
-Operator Sickie (Ceres 0-3)}

>_{Vulcan Zero
-Operator Anvil (Vulcan 0-1)

>-Operator Hammer (Vulcan 0-2)
-Operator Tong (Vulcan 0-3)}
>_{Mercury Zero
-Operator Beaker (Mercury 0-1)
>-Operator Buret (Mercury 0-2)
-Operator Crucible (Mercury 0-3)}
>_{Vesta Zero
-Operator Shovel (Vesta 0-1)
>-Operator Poker (Vesta 0-2)
-Operator Broom (Vesta 0-3)}}]

An hour later of uncomfortable silence Shiala was beginning to fancy the possibility her captors are synthetics like the geth. They only moved to check their weapons or switch positions. They were waiting for something what she wasn't sure until a resonating voice came from outside the room.

"Lieutenant where is she?"

"In the room behind me, Sir."

The clandestine trio had stiffened and were now standing erect with their rifle shouldered for charcoal grey colossus that entered the room while ducking under the archway. Their leader by the looks of him rose a good three inches above the other three ominous titans. Its most noticeable feature an anonymous gold visor that was boring a hole into her soul. Shiala felt an uncontrollable fear wrack her features in the presence of the Two.

:/At ease Ceres Zero,/: 009 commanded through a private cyber link from his positronic brain. "Has she said anything?/:

:/Other than asking for you and Shepard nothing relevant Boss,/: Loy answered he had his SOCOM trained on the Asari's head for the slightest hint of improbable biotics.

:/Found some credits on her Boss. Me and Sickle are running a search on where she's been spending them the last 168 hours.:/ Plough added while putting on the facade that he was rechecking his M114's sights.

:/Aside from one too many footwear investments nada leads,/: Sickle finished while checking the mag of her silenced M8K. :/She seems to be clean Boss.:/:

:/I'm detecting foreign neural activity from her synapses Ori'vod,/: Senti chimed in.

:/The thorian spores?/:

:/No something elseâ€¦protein based nanites. Origin unknown. We'll need to run a postmortem examination to know for sure.:/:

:/We're going to have to hold off that. I promised Shepard I'd let her question the package,/: 009 observed the dilated pupil then the rest of Shiala as he took a knee. "When I speak you answer no more no less, understood?"

"Yes," the remorse in her voice was only overshadowed by her fear of the II who dwarfed almost any manner of being.

"You will cooperate with this investigation, understood?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what this is?" Loy tosses 009 an odd looking knife.

"No."

"It's a Cupid's Knife," the Asari gave him a confused look. "Trust me when I say you do not want to give me a reason to use this. Now in a few minutes a Council Spectre is going to enter this room and you will extend to her the same courtesy, understood?"

"Yes," Shiala was alarmed as she eyed the strange instrument the Mandalore had apparent respect-caution for.

"Good, first question what is Nazara?"

"Nazara? That is what the geth call Saren's warship."

"Explain," 009 kept the blade at ready as he studied the Commando.

"Saren has a vessel. An enormous warship by your standards probably a frigate maybe larger. He calls it Sovereign."

"Sovereign's is over 1.5 Kilometers long?"

"What else can you tell us. Layout, weapons capabilities, complements, and so on?" Plough questioned.

"I don't know any of that. All I do know is that Sovereign can somehow dominate the minds of Saren's followers."

"Indoctrination." Charles began to mentally curse as he recalled the forewarnings in the forerunner archives.

"Yes, somehow we become slaves to Saren's will."

"Care to explain?"

"The process is subtle. It takes days, weeks even. But the ends are always the same. Saren's logic becomes your logic his morals your own until you loose control entirely."

"What did Saren want with Thorian?"

"A Prothean Cipher," 009 motioned her to go on. "The beacon gave Saren visions. But they were unclear, incomprehensible. They were never meant for a non-prothean mind."

"And am I to assume the Cipher provided that comprehension?"

"Yes, this is why I need to speak with Commander Shepard. I know she was exposed to the beacon on Eden Prime and is more than likely experiencing the same symptoms as Saren did."

"You want to meld with her," 009 took a step back not liking the idea.

"Please it is the only way to find the Conduit before Saren does."

"Your indoctrinated. Infected. If you melded with her it is highly probable she will become compromised as well. That's not happening."

"It's a good thing I don't need your permission then," 009 looked back to the Spectre in question with mild vexation at her foolishness.

"Shepard no."

"What are you going to do stop me?" The N7 crossed her arms before staring the faceless cyborg down.

"If I must," Shepard and her party tensed at 009 warning while Section Six readied their weapons.

"Get out of my way Charles your not my father," Shepard persisted condescendingly. 009's knuckles cracked at the sound of his name being used without his permission.

"No but I made a promise."

"And what promise may that be? Please enlighten me."

"The Alliance wanted you and your Mother discharged. Blacklisted," Innovator informed her bluntly. "I made sure that didn't happen."

"We didn't ask you toâ€¦."

"It was the dying wish of a tired soldier and an old friend," Shepard took a step back from the resolute SPARTAN. She heard a concealed weariness in his voice that shook her to her core. It was her father's weariness, Anderson and Hackett's weariness. The weariness of season veteran who had sacrificed too much and asked for little in return.

The Spectre bowed her head in concession before looking up, "Then how am I going to gain the Cipher?"

"â€¦." 009 had no answer for her as of yet. He was considering employing a strong force-user to extract the information, but there was a chance the telepath would be compromised as well. He had so many variables to account for when it came to indoctrination it made even his head spin. There was only one option if they were going to intercept Saren. He was going to have to put his faith in Shepard's resolve if they were going to make any headway.

"Let me do thisâ€¦." Elizabeth emphasized the last bit as the II considered himself for a full psychiatric workup before giving the nod.

:/Sentinel establish a secure neural link to Thel and Bracktanus. We have much to discuss./: 009 thought to his AI partner. He had taken his place at his self-proclaimed spot at the Normandy's requisitions table. The SR-1 was now on its way back to Noveria with all speed as Shepard had taken the SPARTAN'S advice again. Whatever Saren was cooking up at Peak 15 couldn't have been good if he invested billions of credits into the facility.

:/On it Ori'vod./:

Charles couldn't figure what could be worse. Discovering a biological weapon in the rogue Spectre's arsenal or a clone army. Either way the situation needed to be contained quickly. The SPARTAN considered deploying MARS Security personnel for a moment but frowned at the thought. There would be a mounds of paperwork in fines and complaints from the NDC's Executive Board waiting for him in the end if he abused his executive privileges.

009's personal Asymmetric Recoilless Carbine-985 laid disassembled before him as he began to clean and recheck his weapon of choice for wear and tear. He sighed much to his annoyance geth hydraulic fluid had somehow dried and caked its way into the inner workings of his rifle's stock. The SPARTAN's hands involuntary went to work as he felt his conscious slip away from his body and the automated subroutines of his positronic brain take over.

Artificial smoke and the perfumes of the illicit toyed with the commando's senses as he found himself in tavern setting from 1920's America devoid of any visible forms of entry or exit. 009 was unconcerned by the empty dwelling as he checked the cuff links of his SPARTAN II dress uniform. His original had long since been lost to time but here in cyberspace he was free to wear and appear how he subconsciously preferred.

Looking at his reflection in the mirror hidden behind a wall of intoxicants at the rear of the bar he inwardly smiled at the sight of his mother's eye in place of the golden glow of cybernetics he needed to see with in the real world. Chicago styled Dixieland began to filter in soon after from the background. Looking at the corner stage where melodies were springing from he noted that the performers were absent along with any visible trace of their instruments in the speakeasy.

"Welcome back to the Odin's Eye Ori'vod (big brother)," Charles looked down at the virescent youth in flapper attire with a mirthful smirk causing her to frown and pushed a dark chocolate bang away from her emerald eyes in annoyance. "What?"

"Nothing vod'ika (little sister)," he said while taking a knee to give the shorter one of the two a warm hug surprising the AI a little before she quickly accepted it. Innovator was still wearing a half-smile that was cracking his stoic persona when they parted.

"What's with you and what's with that face?" Senti was confused by the sudden bits of warmth she was seeing from him.

"We had our first hug."

"Charles we've hugged before. Like the time I took contro-" 009 place

a firm hand on her shoulder to stop her from gaining momentum.

"I mean as siblings," he corrected. Sentinel blushed in embarrassment at the sentiment coming from the weathered soldier before rushing in for a second hug. It was official now by mandalorian standard they were a family now. The reunification of Mandalore, the founding of the Commonwealth, the Independence War, the Sith-Imperial War, a number of micro brushfire conflicts like the 141 Incident and the lingering Requiem Conflict had been added to their tally of death defying exploits that strengthened their bond.

In the past 3.5 decades Charles had been reserved and quite. Your typical SPARTAN II even by Grey Team's more social standard - now after all this time he was opening up. It was shocking and elating all at the same time. Sentinel wondered if it had something to do with Requiem and the Librarian's supposed upgrades or if his programing was finally starting to wear off.

"A touching moment is it not Thel?" a whisper came from behind.

"To think a Demon and an Ancilla could come to such an understanding. Truly heartwarming Brother," the second interloper teased.

Charles turned to see his fellow Military Councilors. One was wearing the ethereal ceremonial armor of his predecessors. The other was in the robes of a senior Marabout of the Ethos. "Chieftain Rtuous Bracktanus, Arbiter Thel'Vadum I hope your transition was comfortable."

"For the most part yesâ€¦. Though I'm still not found of this artificial setting. It still feels devoid of life. Cold like the infinite recesses of space that surrounds blessed Doisac," the Jiralhanae shifted within his robes before drawing back his hood to display a toothy grin. "A fine place for a friendly scrap though."

"I designed this chat room to be perfectly secure. To act as the digital equivalent of a deliberation chamber. Not as playpen Bracktanus," Sentinel huffed in annoyance and crossed her arms. Charles and Thel chuckled as they watched the 2.4 meter tall Chieftain being scolded by 1.6 meter ancilla on the limitations of cyberspace.

A quarter of an hour later and the trio of commonwealth warlords had taken their seats at a rounded booth in the darkest corner of the speakeasy while Sentinel was lounging at the bar making active the mock patron VI subroutines that would help mask the organic collective's consciousness from any hypothetical intrusions or the ever curious master hacker (a very bored Ancilla).

"Recent events in the last month have yielded two new candidate species to the Emergency Priority Order 100972A-1" 009 began the deliberation.

"Two?" the senior Marabout asked in shock. Out of the three the Chieftain of the Jiralhanae was the most tolerant of the warlords.

"Yes, the first one is Species W745 a race of vile savage beasts that consume entire worlds like locust with an incessant appetite for

biomass and procreation." Thel brought up an image of a creature that resembled crustacean or an insectoid crossed with a reptile of sorts. "For now they are contained to their own galaxy W-40K but I fear for the wellbeing of the sentient inhabitants of this godless realm of mysticism and xenophobia."

"What about this other faction this Chaos your Fleet Master mentioned in his report?" Innovator asked while simultaneously studying the detailed analysis of the combat effectiveness of these Tyranids.

"Colonist accounts from the world we cleansed were scarce at best if not vague. Many are fanatically loyal to this Imperium of Man and their god emperor. Few to none are cooperating."

"Indoctrinated fanaticism is not an evil broken easily with words alone. The Great War has taught us this lesson well brothers," Bracktanus offered his two cents.

"Regardless of the political instability and strife in the region your Fleet Master is right Thel. Species W745 definitely belongs among the races recorded in the Hood Protocol," 009 gave his seal of approval to the condemning.

"As much as it saddens me to say this but our brother is right. These Tyranids are a plague not a people," Bracktanus gave his mark as well.

"So it is agreed then," Thel solidified the conviction with his signature. "Now then on to this Thorian creature Ship Mistress 'Mortum spoke of."

"Species F037 is a plant based species with mind-controlling and telepathic abilities," 009 started. "It also has evolved a massive sensory network remarkably similar to the Flood's own abilities of controlling an unspecified number of infected."

"This Thorianâ€¦. On a scale of one to seven how much of a threat would you consider this being to be?" Bracktanus asked

"Since this was an isolated incident? I would have to say a four. Though if it was given enough time to amass the necessary numbers to be a threat possibly a six or seven."

"Given the fact this creature has the capacity to possess any being that is exposed to its spores for an extended period of time I would vote yes," 'Vadum rested his maw on his intertwined fingers. "The security risks outweigh the benefits of tolerating these creatures."

"Did your SPARTAN Team attempt to broker a peaceful solution with the Thorian?" The Jiralhanae questioned.

"Yes, but its dealings with Saren soured its willingness to comply. From what we've learned so far it considers all other organic life as mere tools or compost for it's growth. Its views were remarkably similar to the Precursors' given that fact alone it would probably be wise to add its name to the list."

"Then it is decided Species F037 will also be added to Emergency

Priority Order 100972A-1," finished the Chieftain as he muttered a silent prayer for forgiveness to the Ethos.

"Now then to the next matter of business the Quarrians' military development," 009 started again.

"They have shown they can be an asset to the greater galactic community and next to the Mandalorians they have the second largest fleet in Commonwealth space," Bracktanus began.

"They've picked up their fare share of the weight of responsibility by patrolling the newly added borders. Pirating have dropped a full fourteen percent since their joining of the Commonwealth," Innovator added.

"The question now is which of the member of the Admiralty Board do we offer a seat to?" Thel finished.

"I nominate Admiral Zaal'Koris vas Qwib-Qwib."

"He's a damned pacifist Mandalore," Vadum spat. "Why not Rael'Zorah or Han'Gerrel?"

"And a War-hawk is any better? Thel, our job is to keep the peace. Not start unnecessary conflicts," the SPARTAN lectured.

"Then Admiral Shala'Raen vas Tonbay," Bracktanus offered a healthy medium. "Former Assault Recon Marine like the other three and a leading member of the Conservation Party."

"Hmmâ€¦, she does have an impeccable service-record," Thel observed as he reviewed Raen's file.

"Shala does have a natural talent at reconciling opposing views," 009 recalled.

"True an excellent mediator," Thel agreed.

"So it's agreed then we will offer Admiral Shala'Raen vas Tonbay a place at our table," Bracktanus gave the final seal of approval before digressing to a more sensitive subject. "Now then this Requiem Incident that came to pass two weeks priorâ€¦."

Charles sighed he knew this was coming. "I know both of your feelings regarding the subject but the UR-Didact forced my hand. Once we learned from the Librarian of his true plans there remains little room for deliberation only corrective action."

"You're attempting to slay the last of our lords Charles," Thel spoke his concern. "Though I don't doubt the integrity of your actions the moment this incident reaches the ears of my people there will be civil unrest."

"The same goes for my own, the Mgalekgolo, and the Unggoy," Bracktanus added soberly

"It's true we are attempting to eliminate UR-Didact," 009 added. "But he is, Not the Didact your collective peoples revere."

"Are you saying there is more than one Charles?" the Thel asked in

shock he was soldier first never the scholar.

"Born-stellar Makes-Eternal-Lasting who succeeded the UR-Didact is your revered savior. Born-stellar activated the rings he made the tough decision that UR selfishly shied away from. He'd sooner assimilate every sentient in the galaxy and leave his people unscathed to ensure Forerunner ascendancy at the cost of our own existence."

The two fellow warlord were silent as they reflected on the implications of what the mandalore was saying before Rtuous voiced what was on both of their minds, "Charles what exactly happened on requiem?"

January 6, 137 ABY: UPM Spirit of Fire, Mandalore the Innovator, Indomitable-Class Dreadnought, Location Unknown Region

Two weeks prior to the instigation of the Eden Prime War Mandalore the Innovator was following the bread crumbs of the culprits that destroyed a forerunner dry dock installation. Residual roentgen and slipspace rupture energy readings dated the destruction of Installation 0459 to around the Liberation of Harvest during the Great War. Scans of the lingering solar waves from when the shield world's artificial sun went supernova indicated a ship had escaped the devastation.

Curious Sierra-009 ordered the Fire's AI Jorbe (Reason) and Senti to triangulate where the more than likely damaged ship drifted off too. In the span of minutes the Spirit of Fire covered hundreds of thousands of lightyears of void till they came a cross a sight the II never thought possible.

"Life signs?" 009 said hopefully.

"Scanningâ€¦. What? Noâ€¦that is impossibleâ€¦. Mandalore your not going to believe this," Jorbe said as he appeared on the tactical holodisplay.

"What's not to believe?" Senti asked the spitting image Canderous Ordo.

"The facility that contained the Mandalore had been renovated by Celestials. That retrofitted colony ship shouldn't even have any power left. Let alone still be in one piece after the collapse of Installation 0459."

"Maybe they got lucky," Senti offered.

"There is no such thing STNL 1452-2." The younger AI argued, "Clearly we are missing some unforeseen variable given the state of CFV-88."

"Focus on the task at hand you two."

"My sincerest apologies Mandalore. Scans reveal there are 9,927 surviving crew aboard the UNSC Spirit of Fire currently in deep cryo. Their life signs are slowly fading I estimate given the current rate of decay the majority of the pods will fail within 179 hours GS time. If the projected collision with the unregistered forerunner installation in two days doesn't kill them first."

"Alert medical and engineering." Charles began, "I want teams ready to tag along with marine fire teams to evac the crew ASAP."

"Already on it Reaper," Senti used 009's old call sign while the bridge crew scrambled with professionalism he had come to expect from all of them.

"Jorbe prep the tractor beam and lets get ready to tow them to safety."

"Wilco Mandalore. Shall I run a scan of the shield world and the derelict fleet surrounding it while I'm at it?"

"Do it. Those are CCS Class Battlecruisers from the Great War. I want know what they're doing here."

"Understood milord."

Captain James Gregory Cutter was parked in medical bay of the Spirit of Fire just not his Spirit of Fire. The bewildered UNSC CO who was pushing 53 was being treated by a sentient that was clearly not human, 'the girl has horns for crying out loud.' When asked she said she was a Baar'ur (doctor) and a Togruta and kept it simply at that. Cutter's tongue was still reeling at his attempts to speak the alien lingo along with the rest of the Fire's crew.

Former Lieutenant Commander Sierra-009's or the Mandalore the Innovator as he is now calling himself had order the ship's AI Jorbe to compile a data cache of all the known languages they had acquired over the years for downloaded to their Neural Interfaces.

Doctor Ashla had just informed him that like the rest of the colony ship's surviving crew he had developed Hypocryo-Metabolic Syndrome. "Treatments are available to help you manage your condition Captain. Though they are moderately effective at best."

"Your saying there's no cure Doc?"

"At the moment none to speak of Sir," the young physician spoke remorsefully. She reached out to the weather soldier hand who flinched at the alien contact before relaxing himself. Ashla smiled a little at the apologetic look on Cutter's face as she watched him sincerely repress his xenophobia. Many of the First Fire's crew had developed unspoken prejudice against non-humans since the start of the Great War which was causing some unspoken tension between the two groups. "Please understand before the Mandalore's discovery. Something like HM-Syndrome was nothing but pipe dream for the vain and desperate. If anything people were trying gain such a condition not cure it."

"So this treatment option?" the greying man's eyes pierced her mirroring blues for a second causing the Togruta to flushed. There was a subtle charm to the gruff UNSC Officer that sent goosebumps down the baar'ur's (doctor's) spine as she retracted her dainty hand from Cutter's contrasting calloused one to retrieve a holopad containing Cutter's latest bio-scans.

"Yes, well there is a medication our Mandalore is currently taking," she unconsciously crossed her long legs in a carnal manner while

inspecting her notes. Ashla seemed oblivious to it as squad of ODSTs began snickering in the corner causing the even more oblivious Widower to raise an eyebrow at their antics. "The effects are minuscule at best. For every standard twenty years you age biologically one. Though as of this moment we are in short supply of the prescription."

"How short?"

"About a years worth for one individual."

"And there is 9,927 of us." Cutter sighed in defeat as he accepted to the fact that he had some extra down time on his hands, "Where is Sierra-009 and Red Team?"

"In the armory Captain," Jorbe's voice chimed in nonchalantly. "Where elseâ€|? Sir."

_ [Codex/Ships Entry_UPM Indomitable-Class Dreadnought: Currently the second largest class of capital ships at the UPM's disposal. The Indomitable-Class gives new dreadful meaning to Roosevelt's saying, "Speak softly and carry a big stick."

{Manufacturer: United Provinces of Mandalore}
>{Length: 16.6983 Kilometers}
{Width: 3.574 Kilometers}

>{Heightdepth: 2.138 Kilometers}
>{Propulsion units:
_2-Hyper/Slipspace Drives
>_5-GEN36 Repulsor engines}
{Shielding: GEN13 Multi-layered
Hard-light Generators}
>{Hull: 700cm Coltan-Titanium M3 armor plating}
{Armaments:

>_1-Hard-light ram
_1-Superlaser
>_2-Super Magnetic Accelerator Cannons (Primary)
_5-Energy
Projectors
>_10-Gravity well projectors
_12-75cm Mark/3748 6.1GJ Magnetic
Accelerator Cannons (Secondary)
>_24-Plasma Torpedo Pods
_52-tractor beam projectors

>_70-Hard-light turrets
_142-Hard-light Flak Turrets

>_500-Bowman Proton missile pods (Tertiary)}}
{Complements:

>_1-GUNGNIRYGGDRASIL Mark I Prototype Armor Defense System.

>_6-CARNWENNANYGGDRASIL Mark V Armor Defense Systems (
fullmetalpanic/images/f/f6/ARX8_Laevatein_-_Front_)

>_12-Gargon-Class Light Frigates
_20-HRUNTING/YGGDRASIL Mark LII
Armor Defense Systems.

>_30-Mobile Anti-Aircraft Weapons Platform P620 SiegeworkUltra-Heavy.

>_40-HRUNTINGYGGDRASIL Mark XLV Armor Defense Systems.

>_100-Dropship 120 Heavy-Troop Carriers "Ospreys" (www.
3dm/gunships/gs-06_)

>_120-F05 Werdakad Combat Aerial Vehicles Bombers (
files/Image/111001-112000/111138/818_)

>_150-P090 "Scorpios" Main Battle Tanks (filesSAC-tachikoma1_)


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>_300-P24 "Bomas" Force Application Vehicles (
uploads/posts/2011-10/1317567911_ )
>_5000-GEN8 Single Occupant Exoatmospheric Insertion Vehicles ( .
_cb20081226192558/halo/images/1/13/Halo3-ODST_ )
>_25,000-RLT-186 Emergency Escape Pods ( .
_cb20080214013623/starwars/images/d/d3/EscapePod_ )}
>{Standard Crew:<br>_Total: 75,500
>_Spartan IIs: 1<br>_Naval: 26,497
>_Marines: 30,748<br>_Tier 2 Vu'traat (special forces): 14,748

>_Spartan Vs: 3,000<br>_MIN: 500
>_MINSAD-6: 6}<br>{Cargo capacity: 460,000 metric tons}
>{Wartime Passenger Capacity: 250,000}<br>{Other systems: Jorbe
(Reason), UPMAF Contender-Class AI Serial Number JB 0384-1}]
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"Andâ€¦ I thinks that's it." Charles finished giving his fellow Two's the tour of the ship saving the best for last, the armory of course. There were several others scatter throughout the ship but none had the kind of selection the main armory offered.

"You've been busy 009," Sierra-092, Jerome vocalized for the rest of his team. Douglas-042 the tallest of the group just gave a nod of approval, while Alice-130 curiously eyed the new MARS-840 Light Machine Gun (modern variant of the UNSC M739) and then the M945 Heavy Machine Gun/Anti-MatÃ©riel (modern variant of the UNSC M655).

Charles chuckle before giving them the nod to try out the new toys. Almost immediately the trio went for the weapons that caught their fancy and began testing them at the firing range at the opposite end of the armory. Grabbing a GEN7 Boltshot and Light-Rifle he decided to join them and show case the more exotic ordinance to the younger Twos.

Two days had passed and Alice-130 was affectionately cradling her new M945 HMG with a MARS-840 LMG for overkill was slung to her back in the boot of a D120H-TC Osprey. The rest of Red Team was rather silent as they were coming to terms with everything that had recently happen. The UNSC was gone, they won the war, but they were well over 200,000 years too late for the victory dance.

Charles-009 was at helm going over a report with a MIN analyst on the line reviewing the missing science team with MIN5 escort case. The team had gone dark about two hour ago at something called a Cartographer. Across from Alice and Red Team sat 009's prototype SPARTAN VIs. Mercury Zero the Mandalore called them their call signs read as Beaker, Buret, and Crucible on Alice's HUD.

They were silent, focused, and disciplined. Rarely speaking unless spoken too much like Red Team and Reaper. Nothing like the rowdy and cocksure Spartan Fives Sierra-130 had met earlier they reminded her of overgrown ODSTs. It was only when they were five minutes out from their objective that Beaker or Mercury 0-1 decided to strike up a conversation with the paralleling Twos.

"So you three enjoying the new upgrades?" Mercury's Lead leaned in after checking her silenced M8K for the 121st time. Her voice carried an air of culture sophistication that was different from the other Mandalorian accents Red Team encountered so far.

"For the most part yes," Jerome answered for the group. Beaker tilted her head inquisitively so he continued. "I know this GEN5 Semi-Powered Infiltration armor is superior both defensively and offensively to our Mark IVs in every possible way it's justâ€¦."

"Feels alien right?" Sierra-092 nodded along with his fellow Twos. "I know how you feel. It's like being naked. The sheer weightless of it is overwhelming at first. It takes some time getting used to."

_ [Codex/Technology Entry_MINSAD-6 Semi-Powered Infiltration armor GEN5: The GEN5 is an advance infiltration combat skin that upsets every model to date with improved streamlined maneuverability and speed. The SPI program prototypes most if not all of the technology now implemented in MJOLNIR series. It should be noted that only SPARTAN II's, III's, and Section-6's physiologies are compatible with this armor. Unfortunately, the system is so reactive that normal human beings or Spartan IVs & Vs cannot use the suit without permanently injuring or even killing themselves in the process.

>_New and improved Atmospheric Insertion Protocols (Armor Lock basically) without aid from a SOEIV (Single Occupant Exoatmospheric Insertion Vehicle).
_Automatic Biofoam-bacta injectors.
>_Two Micro Corusca Fusion Arc Reactors.
_Multi-layered Hard-light overshield-emitters to the tier level of two
>_Wrist mounted Hard-light Daggers.
_Experimental Hard-light manipulators.
>_Standard Multi-environment Adaptive Camouflage or SMAC (think OctoCamo from Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots).
_Mark XX Active Camouflage (provides invisibility for up to twenty-four hours and even hides a wearer's thermal and force signature).
>_Active Contender-class AI transfer protocols.
_Nano-technological components which enables the armor to repair and upgrade itself autonomously without outside influence.]

"Trust me when I say once I'm finished with the Mark XIII you three will feel right at home," 009 exited the cockpit to retrieve his ARC-985 from the weapons rack with a pair of SOCOMs on top of two Sangheilian swords retrofitted to emit hard-light instead of plasma before shouldering his Custom Light-Rifle (or CLR).

"What about the next SPI, Sir?" Crucible voice rumbled with gravel over the pumping of his Saber-killer (MARS-77 Tactical Shotgun) as he attached a silencer and tactical foregrip. Buret had stopped cleaning her silenced MARS-840 LMG to listen in a well.

"The GEN5 Mark IV is still underdevelopment. We're trying to find a way to increase durability without sacrificing mobility," 009 looked at his fellow Twos while Team Mercury nodded with satisfaction. Much to his amusement Red Team had given their new SPI armor the same paint jobs as their old Mark IVs. All that was missing were the gold visors.

"Landing in sixty seconds Ramikade (Commandos)," chimed the pilot on the comm as the immersing glow of red deployment lights filled the cabin. Everyone gave each other a quick once over to be sure everything was secure before filing off the ramp and spreading out to secure the landing zone. They remained ever vigilant even after the

all clear was given. Continuously they swept the citadel like structure that was housed at the back of Requiem's more narrow canyons with caution.

"Echo 351 move off for now and engage your stealth drive. Stay on station for exfil, acknowledge?"

"Roger that Sierra Oh-Oh-Niner moving off to keep a low profile. Echo 351 out."

"Mercury 0-2 and Sierra-042 on point." Charles pointed to passage that led to the local cartographer.

"So this is the map room the science team found?" Charles questioned the AI linked up to the forerunner net. MINSAD and Alice were maintaining the perimeter while Jerome and Douglas swept the area for clues to the science team's disappearance.

"This is the cartographer's terminal," Senti began analyzing. "Previous log entry has UPMF Smart AI Serial Number BF 3182-2 registered as the last user of this terminal approximately 4.67 hours ago."

"That'll put 'em still here 15 minutes after to their last scheduled check in Boss," Buret scanned the area carefully like the others she had a sinking feeling they were being watched.

"No shell casing or scorch marks," Douglas radioed on the return sweep.

"Zero signs of struggle Sir. If they left, they did so willingly," Jerome finished.

"If they were moving they would have reported in. Sentinel any clues?"

"Only one this terminal received a distress signal prior to last log on Reaper. The team must have answered it."

"An SOS?" 009 questioned. "None of this makes any sense, why didn't they report this in?"

"Unknown. Perhaps their radio's were being jammed?" the pieces were coming together in Charles's head and he wasn't liking the over all picture. Someone had lured his people away with a bogus signal and blocked all attempts to communicate with the Spirit of Fire, 'another rampant Monitor AI perhaps?'

"Senti where did this SOS originate?"

"Somewhere deep within the installation's core. There is a terminus console that we can use to reach the source."

"All right, send a complete report to the Spirit of Fire. Tell them to maintain position outside Requiem and to have two Marine battalions prepped for deployment. We're going in after them."

"Negative Mandalore. Long range communications are being jammed," 009 signaled Mercury to take point as Red covered the rear to the NAV Marker Senti placed.

"Echo 351 you reading me?"

"Loud and clear Sir," Charles swept his CLR towards the movement in the corner of his eye. What ever it was, the unknown was staying just at the edge of their combined radar sweep.

"Can you get the Fire on the horn?"

"One secondâ€¦|what the devil? It was working a second ago," the others' heard the flustered muttering on the other end of the line. "Strange. My short range seems to be the only thing working right now Sir."

"Understood, dead zone confirmed. Senti transfer the report and orders to Echo 351."

"Done."

"Echo 351 your our runner get to the Fire and then back with Werdakad escort ASAP."

"Wilco Sir Echo 351 falling back. Good luck."

"I'm getting one of those feelings Boss," Crucible voiced what everyone else was feeling. Mercury 0-3 switched to the BR on his back and prepped the underslung launcher with a Jericho grenade.

"Cover us," Ordered the 009 as he linked Senti to the terminus. The entire trek to the tower had been too uneventful for their liking. "Anything?"

"Searchingâ€¦|it seems this terminus is just one junction of a more massive transit system that stretches the entire installation."

"Can it help us narrow down the science teams location?"

"I'm trying but the ruddy signal keeps bouncing allover the place," Senti growled in frustration before jumping in fright. Something had just brushed against her coding. "I-I what the?!"

"Sentinel are you all right?" 009 didn't even hesitate for a second to yank her out of danger and return her to the safety of his Mark VII, "What happened?"

"Something in thereâ€¦|was watching me," Charles felt her shudder in the recesses of his mind. Causing him to mentally reach out and comfort her.

:/Talk me through it. What happen are you hurt?/: 009 linked his thoughts to her's for privacy. Senti smiled at the warm concern coming from her usually neutral protector.

:/I'm fine thanks. You pulled me out just in time from whatever that thing was./:

009 sighed in relief, :/What was it some kind of security AI we never encountered before?/:

:/Moments before it attempted to attack me it identified me as

Progressio-Homo-Sapiens-Ancilla./:

:/Meaning?/:

:/Advance Human AI, apparently it saw me as a serious threat,/: that made 009 stiffen. If Senti was now classified as a threat then this wasn't over not by a long shot.

"Multiple unknown signatures inbound via micro-slipspace ruptures!" she barked out loud to warn the others. Immediately the SPARTANS raised their weapons to meet the unidentified synthetics warping into reality all around them growling at the presence of the uninvited guests.

"They don't look friendly," Beaker deadpanned.

"Neither are we," Jerome readied his own ARC-985 and switched it to full auto with his finger on the trigger like the others. Charles observed the orange glowing mimetic synthetics with fascination as he readied his GEN7 CLR.

"Senti what are these things?" 009 was making note the GEN1 Light-Rifles, Suppressors, Scattershots, and even Binary-Rifles in the possession of the unknowns.

"I don't knowâ€|. Their profiles don't match anything we have on record from commonwealth, forerunner, or celestial archives. What are they waiting for?"

"Orders," Alice-130 answered simply as the unknown leveled their weapons at the Commandos.

"Open fire," Charles fired a controlled burst into the closest synthetic falling into a rhythm with the others. 009 mentally cursed he hadn't finished the Mark XIII earlier his shields were taking a pounding from the onslaught. His first two layers had collapsed and his second to last layer was almost halfway down. The others in their GEN5 SPI armor were easily holding thanks to the superior resistance and recharge rates of their shields.

"Fascinating," Senti was deep in thought.

"Care to share with rest of us?" Charles easily sidestepped an Incineration Cannon blast allowing his second and third layers the much needed reprieve to recharge before switching his CLR to full auto and reducing the offending AI to ash.

"Every time one of them "dies" a data purge is initiated."

"Catch anything good?" Question Beaker as she beheaded a construct with her hard-light daggers before unloading her M8K into the stomach of another offender.

"The data strands label these things as Promethean Knights."

"Impossible the Prometheans were organics not clanckers," Buret dismissed over the roar of her LMG. "Archeological evidence proves it."

"Don't get snippy with me that's what the data say!"

"Enough!" Barked the Mandalore as he switched to his SOCOMs duel wielding them with a level precision that was impossible for an ordinary being. "What these thing are called is academic. We're falling back to the exit before we get overwhelmed by these Knights. Crucible clear the hole. Alice, Buret keep the path clear."

"Gladlyâ€| Jericho in the hole," Mercury Three aimed his underslung launcher into the air and fired, what transpired next was horrifically beauty. The 'smart' grenade he had loaded earlier spiraled over the ignorant inorganic masses ascending three stories before unveiling the 160 repulsor guided micro fission neutron missiles. The guided antipersonnel warheads seemed to hang in the air for a moment before hell in a jar cascaded upon the Promethean legions.

"They blow up real nice," Buret was clearly smiling impishly under her helmet.

"Clearlyâ€|." Senti sassed at the destruction with mirth.

"Plowing the road," Alice began their advance. Red Team was not about to be outdone by the new bloods. Sierra-130 and Mercury 0-2 leveled there combined machine guns at the masses keeping the path clear to the exit as 009 and the others guarded their six.

"Suppressing fire! Don't let any of 'em through the entrance - Senti get this lift down now!" Charles barked as Sentinel began remote hacking the elevator controls.

"Almost thereâ€|I got it!" the SPARTANS and AI began their descent.

"Good job Senti," Charles complimented before pointing at the swarm of Prothean Knights flying in from above. "Crucible another Jericho if you please."

"Wilco Boss, clanckers go boom." Charles and the others watched as the shredded remains came raining down in buckets worth with satisfied smirks etched on their faces. Clearly weapons superiority was their's judging by the way they cut through those mechs with apparent ease. Red Team was silent during the rest of the descent as they took it all in. It had just occurred to them that for the first time in their lives since the Insurrection they had the technological tactical edge. They had just cut though a several companies of troops with little effort.

Douglas looked at both of his MARS-88S SMGs (modern M7S SMGs) in shock before quoting Sergeant Forge, "Wellâ€|Yipee-kai-yay." Causing a stir among his squad-mates for the first time since they could remember they began to laugh. Charles chuckled at the inside joke before looking at a confuse Team Mercury.

"It's a UNSC thing," 009 said with a rare smile before swapping out the Arc battery for his CLR and then switching to his ARC-985. "I'll explain later when we don't have COMPANY."

They followed his line of sight to the hordes of synthetics waiting

for them down bellow. "One last sprint?" Jerome questions as he readied himself next to 009.

"Looks like itâ€¦," the SPARTANS were in good humor despite the situation. Charles made sure his most volatile concoction of HEIRs (High Explosive Incendiary Rounds) were loaded before whistling to Crucible. "Hit 'em with another salvo."

Mercury's explosives expert had the SPARTAN equivalent of cheshire cat grin plastered across his face now. The Mandalore had just given him permission to use a Jericho grenade for third time today a new all time record for the pyromaniac as he launched the article of death into the Promethean legion waiting for them. What came next almost made Crucible faint for joy.

"Two more SPARTAN," 009 didn't hear Senti's chiding remarks about overkill over the deafening storm of concussion from the extra two grenades. Several hundred were torn asunder and atomized by superheated plasma while hundreds more were destroyed by the combined concussion that was amplified by the confined dwelling. Thirty seconds later seven armor locks winked out as the SPARTAN Team rose from the Promethean ashes ready for the next fight.

"Almost seems unfairâ€¦," said Alice loaded her HMG with a fresh Matter-Replicator-Feed before the spinning sound of the minigun's electric motor whirled cruelly into existence. More than half of the forerunner battalion was irradiated ash the other half outside the blast radii were crippled irrevocably beyond belief. They were for the most part being held to together only by the synthetic equivalent of sinews.

"I don't do fair," Buret deadpanned while slapping a new drum to her MARS-840. The others reloaded while Crucible silently wished he had more Jerichos as he switched to his silenced M77.

"Someone should tell them," Douglas holstered his SMGs and unveiled the M89-P SAM Launcher (modern M41 SSR MAV/AW) he had on his back. The Jackhammer as it was lovingly called was four barrels of oblivion to anyone who'd stare it down. "Sir?"

"Fire at will," was 009's answer. Sierra-042 waited for the Knights to bunch up and charge before unleashing the quartet salvo of hard-light encased neutron warheads. Though not as magnificently devastating as the Jericho the Neutron HEAT missile were more than enough of a punch to the nose to break the enemy's advance. "Moveâ€¦."

The massacre that had ignited upstairs in the terminus room was now spreading like wildfire at the tower's entrance. The SPARTANS were advancing in eruptions of HEIR fire and Hard-light lances - merciless to anyone foolish enough to hold their ground. Adrenal glands worked in overtime pumping epinephrine through the cybernetic outfit's veins slowing time around them to a crawl. SPARTAN Time was in its fullest potency now pushing the commandos to inconceivable speeds that caused even the Promethean Knights' processors to lag in response to their otherworldly offensive. The SPARTANS were half way through the legion when an imperious voice reverberated through the hall pausing the synthetics.

"Impressiveâ€¦," the remaining Knights parted growling in compliance

to a formidable mass of armor and muscle. "Even if my men were still flesh and blood I suspect the results would be equally ruinous. Truly man is capable, but of the Mantle? The carnage is undeniable your appetite for destruction has not lessen with the aid of time. You remain unworthy, Chamanune."

"Now THAT'S a Promethean," Buret chided Senti over their private comm as the daunting figure of a being clearly over 4 meters tall made his approach.

"What did you do to the science team and their escort?" 009 questioned he was not impressed by the sight of the daunting giant.

"They freed me from my the great harvest of my betrayal. Their removal from my grace was swift and merciful," the Forerunner spoke with indifference for the matter. "A kindness, I make to you Chamanune. Your nobility is telltale as ever, even in this cycle."

"A generous offer," Charles put it on show of musing before answering with a rhetorical. "Bal meg is gehatyc be ner vode bal haar drotene ni cabur meh ni ceta (and what is to be of my comrades and the peoples I protect if I kneel)?

Promethean eyes narrowed behind the anonymity of his combat skin, "Though I do not speak that tongue I know a mockery when I hear it Chamanune."

"Figured that out all by yourself eh?" Senti rejoinder from the Mark VII.

"Allowing an ancilla to speak for you unchecked? Most curiousâ€¦." There was casual fascination in the Forerunner's voice, "Tell me warrior are all your constructs as unsteady as this one or has rampancy already claimed her? Are you so sentimental that you would cling to her as you do to that haggard combat skin?"

"Tion gar gai?," the Spartan growled but the forerunner titan made no effort to respond. "I said what's your name?"

"I'm the Didact."

"I asked for your name not your rank Di'kut (idiot)," Charles flipped his ARC to full auto for the Promethean.

"Are you challenging me warrior? Very well I am Forerunner, Scion of the Warrior-servant Caste, Champion of the Mantle, Supreme Commander of the Legion and MY Fellow Prometheans, I stand before you as the Didact known first as Unrequited-steward Rectifying-Eternal-Sovereignty."

"Not Born-stellar?"

"You would prefer the pawn?" Unrequited-steward questioned with curiosity. "No matter, I have answered your challenge Chamanune now would you do me the honor of giving me your name?"

"Supreme Commander Sierra-009, SPARTAN II Commando of the United Provinces of Mandalore Armed Forces, Mandalore the

Innovator."

"Mand'alor? So the Savage Taung have named a Chamanune as their Champion and Sole Ruler. Most amusing," Unrequited-steward mused. The Didact observed the warriors behind the so called Mandalore. They were capable, disciplined, and indomitable true rivals for his Promethean brothers and sisters. UR then frowned at the thought of such nobility being lost when they would be composed before dismissing it as necessary sacrifice for the greater good. "Chamanune your kind brought the Flood to our shores and in doing so shattered the very Ecumene that sheltered all. Now your kind will aid in its rekindling. It is a kindness you do not deserve."

:/Senti start prepping the firmware for the Mark VII's shield manipulators,/: 009 thought while tightening his grip on his ARC. His fellow SPARTANS were ready to strike back if provoked. "Explain, what are you planning, what is it you want?"

"What I want is inaccessible, irrelevant now Warrior. Not even the Precursors in their near infinite wisdom could placate what your kind has destroyed. Now only my duty remains."

"Time was your ally, Chamanune." Charles readied himself, "But now it has abandoned you, the Forerunners have returned."

:/Tractor beam detected!/: Senti cried out in warning as the Two sidestepped the veiled ripple in the air that made 009 pause for a millisecond before SPARTAN Time kicked in again with a roar of automatic fire before rolling forward to avoid a devastating right hook from the Promethean that quaked the hall as it penetrated the reenforced alloy flooring. Charles didn't give the titan a chance to recover as he sweep kicked the Didact's feet out from underneath and began to unload the rest of his mag into the Promethean before being catapulted in to the air by an invisible punch that reminded the SPARTAN of one of Darth Krayt's crushing force pushes. :/Shield manipulators are armed and ready!/:

Gold tethers of light launched themselves from the Mark VII like harpoons into the ground slingshotting the SPARTAN at breakneck speeds back at recovered UR who was rearing for another go with the II. The Didact reached out with a gesture that reminded 009 of a force grip before using the tethers to tow himself low at the last second so he could slide between the forerunners legs and backflip onto the Promethean's back to catch him in a stranglehold.

"Yield," 009 growled as the Didact attempted to buck him.

"Guack!" Unrequited-steward began to fall backwards despite Charles best efforts to keep his opponent balanced. The forerunner was intent pinning the II under his weight. The venom in Unrequited-steward's voice was unmistakable now, "You first warrior."

Charles launched himself yet again into the air using the crucial milliseconds to catch a glimpse of his fellow SPARTANS overwhelming the remaining synthetics before unsheathing Daisy's combat knife in a reverse grip and hurling himself at the Didact who was once again back on his feet with hard-light blades at ready in both hands.

"Remarkable chamanuneâ€|. Truly remarkable," Charles weaved through the blurred motions of the Promethean's blades while seamlessly using his shield manipulators repel the unavoidable strikes. "The Mantle accepts all who live fiercely, had your predecessors achieved such nobility I suspect I would not be here to do battle this day."

"Is that a compliment?" 009 questioned while sidestepping another blow to add another minute dent into Didact's nearly impervious armor. He dare not slow down and risk being run through by the Promethean. One mistake, one miscalculation and this was over for the commando, Charles knew that. His opponent was wearing the fabled Forerunner Class 32 combat skin and his Mark VII was only comparable to a Class 3. If he survived this Charles resolved himself to finishing the Mark XIII and implementing it into his arsenal effective immediately. If it wasn't for his secondary re-augmentations and his decades worth of combat experience he'd be riddled with scorching holes and streams of blood would be flowing from his person.

"Oly Oly Oxen Free," the six notes whistled in Charles's ear over the private comm link causing him to smirk as he made room for Alice to deliver a hard-light enhanced haymaker to the Didact's gut while Buret jump stepped off of 009's kneeling form to deliver a roundhouse to the forerunner's face causing the Didact to stumble back.

Unrequited-steward Rectifying-Eternal-Sovereignty didn't bother looking around his heightened senses sharpened from many millennia of warfare made him aware that he was encircled long before his eyes glanced at the radar in the corner of his HUD.

"It seems I have been bested." UR observed the SPARTANS waiting for a kill order to execute. One wrong move and they would cut him down long before he tapped into Requiem's translocation grid. Mandalore the Innovator was now assessing whether the Promethean's capture would be worth the risks.

"DEMONS. RELINQUISH YOUR BLASPHEMOUS CLAIM FROM THE HOLY DIDACT AT ONCE," a shimmer in the air growled as Charles pushed Alice out of harms way before drawing the retrofitted Sangheilian blades from his thighs to block next strike from a massive plasma sword. 009's legs nearly buckled under the force of his attacker before he found the strength to push his new opponent back.

"It can't beâ€|," Arbiter Thel'Vadum growled in utter hate at the image of the massive Sangheili before Charles. "Sharquoiâ€|."

"Wait, those are Sharquoi?" Sierra-009 questioned. He had heard of them but never seen one before now. He looked at the sight of 5.2 meters of hulking flesh and cybernetics on the monitors with surprise. Even Chieftain Rtuous was shocked.

"But brother I thought they were all but extinct after the Great War," the collective looked grimly at the image of Elites that resemble machines more than Sangheili. "Their are dozen of decrees in your noble Imperium that make creation of these monstrous creatures nigh impossible."

"So we thoughtâ€|," the Arbiter hung his head in shame before looking

up again with vengeance in his eye for this atrocity.

"The Sharquoi the trice-damned abominations of the San'Shyuum. These monsters are forged in hate, not duty. They indulge in the flesh of the innocent and the blood of the noble. There is no honor in their veins only a foul deathâ€|. That is all they embody," Thel recited his forefathers' teaching with venom. "By the Gods who could you create such abominations."

"Does the name 'Mdama mean anything to you Thel?"

"Jul'Mdama perhaps?" Charles waved him to continue with his explanation. "He was a cult leader that managed an impressive offensive comprised of Covenant Loyalists against those faithful to my ancestor Thel'Vadam the current Arbiter of Sanghelios almost twenty years following the end of the Great Schism."

"Yes, I remember the name he claimed to be the Didact Hand acting only in his masters absence apparently." Rtuous contemplated, "He never would claim to be his voice like the San'Shyuum foolishly tried to boast. He was a very charismatic and powerful man during his time."

"You mean dangerousâ€|no doubt this is the reason why 'Vadam took his head," Charles inferred.

"Correct brother. Though it seems some of his loathsome kin escaped the cleansing fire of his keep and are making trouble yet again."

"These aren't your run of the mill Sangheili traditionalist look at these bio scans specifically the genetic degradation in their coding," the Mandalore pointed out as the image of deformed Sangheili (343 version of elites) appeared before the trio.

"No this can not be possible," Thel muttered at the visage of an armor-less Sangheili after focusing on the cerebral scans. "Theirâ€|devolved how-"

"By your elevated standards brother." Rtuous spoke with fascination, "This subspecies seems to have adapted for an environment that is more constraining than your fellow Sangheili (Bungie's final version of elites)."

"Given their skin discoloration and size I'd surmise that these Sangheili have spent countless generations in deep space insolation," Charles sighed in remorse. He could see the heartbreak on his friend face as he accepted the fate of his fellow Sangheili.

"By the Gods they are shadows of their former selves."

"True, but-" Thel cut 009 off.

"These are not Sangheili," there was growing fury in the Arbiter's voice.

"Thelâ€|."

"No Sangheilian of right mind would create Sharquoi and allow their children to devolve into theseâ€|these animals!"

"Calm yourself brother." Bracktanus placed a firm paw on his comrades shoulder staying his wrath, "Don't let this dishonor cloud your judgement. Now then Charles please continue your tale."

The II merely nodded as he began to play the memory yet again.

{To be continued}

9. Chapter 7 Part 2

****Yes I KNOW ALREADY! I'm alive... weird huh? I'd tell you the epic tale of my**** ****journey to this point but ****_it's a secret_**...**
****Not to mention just plain depressing. Beside gotta maintain some sense of anonymity ya know or one of you lot is going to pulling an ****_Annie Wilkes._**** So disclaimer and all that jazz. OC's and original idea's are MINE... the rest belong to their respective franchises.****

****Cheers****

Chapter 7 Part 2

"DEMONS. RELINQUISH YOUR BLASPHEMOUS CLAIM FROM THE HOLY DIDACT AT ONCE," a shimmer in the air growled as Charles pushed Alice out of harms way before drawing his retrofitted Sangheilian blades from his thighs to block the succeeding strike from a massive plasma sword. The SPARTAN'S legs nearly buckled under the force of his attacker before he found the strength to push his new opponent back.

Panting from the exertion Charles gritted his teeth in frustration as he watched peripherally Unrequited-steward's escape into Requiem's transit grid. While their opponents a quintet of massive Sangheili that must have weighed more than a damned rancor each stood before them impeding the SPARTAN Team's advance. Each of the black monstrosities stood at an astounding 5.2 meters with more armaments than a Mgalekgolo kill team.

009 sidestepped another overextended swing from his would-be assassin and got in close for a strike against the Sangheili's tibia. Much to the Two's disbelief the leg was unshielded as the hard-light blade effortlessly severed the bottom half of the monster's leg from the rest of its being. Charles leapt back with a skid and watched in SPARTAN Time as his opponent slowly collapsed under its own cumbersome weight. Not a word or an exclamation of pain was uttered from the massive creature as it leveled what resembled a fuel rod gun mounted on its forearm at the SPARTAN.

The spell of adrenaline never slackened as the Mandalore rushed the crippled Sangheili and amputated the forearm housing the charging assault cannon before driving his blades into the skull of the brute. Charles watched as the eerie glow of red cybernetic optics fade for a millisecond before leaping away from his fallen foe as a torrent incendiary gel cascaded on his last position consuming Sangheili till nothing remained but ash and dust.

Unmoved by the loss the remaining four behemoths silently leveled their collective artillery at the SPARTANS.

"TINUY YEERTH SIY NWOD. (Unit three is down.)" the largest of the group the leader buy the looks of him spoke in an unfamiliar if not abrasive Sangheilian dialect confusing 009 and his AI companion. Whoever these Sangheili were they were not from the outer colonies or inner core of the Imperium. The vernacular was completely alien to anything on the register. "NEPOY YERIF. (Open fire.)"

The virescent glow of the firing line composed of wrist mounted fuel rods reached a dazzling apex before a wave of incendiary gel impacted the last position of the evading commandos. "Get in close and hit 'em hard. Their reaction time is slower than ours. So spit up into pairs keep 'em off balanced and drop 'em. Big one's mine."

"What about you?" Sierra-092 questioned as he found himself paired with Crucible. Both were unloading their respective shotguns into their adversary.

"I got Senti to watch my six. Now move," 009 charged the leader who had a fuel rod on each arm and a wookiee sized energy sword in each hand.

"ACCURSED DEMON YOU WILL SUFFER FOR YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS AGAINST THE PROPHETS," eighteen feet of steel and augmented bio-synthetic muscle growled before unleashing its guns. "YOUR WORLDS WILL BURN AND YOUR NATIONS HARVESTED FOR THE ECUMENE'S REVIVAL."

"So your allied with the Prometheans?" Charles asked the obvious in an attempt to fish out more information from his opponent as he skirted around the swings of the cumbersome luminescent weapons.

"WE ARE THE FORERUNNER'S INSTRUMENTS! THEIR WILL!" The leaders vocals resonated into a roar. "WE ARE THE BLESSED FAITHFUL OF THE DIDACT'S HAND! SERVANTS OF THE SAGACIOUS AUGURS THAT DECEND FROM THE NOBLE JUL'MDAMA. WE ARE THE FAITHFUL CHILDREN OF HESDUROS."

"Hesduros? "

"BIRTHPLACE OF THE SUCCEEDING WARRIOR-SERVANTS OF THE DIDACT! THE HESDUROI!"

[illegible]

"Hesduroi?" questioned Rtuous as he glanced at the disturbed scowl becoming more prominent on the Arbiter's mandibles.

"Hesduros was a Sangheilian colony that was lost during the Sangheili Civil War," Charles answered. Vadum seemed at a lost for words at the moment as he observed the former Sangheili. "It seems that in their isolation that they no longer consider themselves Sangheiliâ€¦. I'm sorry Thel."

"Jul'Mdamaâ€¦" the faithful Sangheili growled to a ghost. "Leader of the traitorous blood of the Bekan Keep. Hear this. I vow to finish what my ancestor began and uproot the last of your treacherous seed from the soil that bore it. By culling all who grow under its malignant tending."

009 and Bracktanus would have been stunned by the vow to the departed

if this was any other sangheili, but it wasn't. This was Thel'Vadum. Only he would have the audacity to make such a pledge of vengeance against the dead and in doing so damn an entire subspecies to mass execution. There was no way out of this when the followers of Mdamá unwittingly damned themselves in the eye's of the devote scion of Sanghelios.

Sangheilian words are sacred, names especially. They hold meaning and title through honour and tradition spanning countless generations that have followed the epitaph of their founding. To renounce one's claim to the roots of Sanghelios is renouncing of what it means to be a Sangheili. The very title that has been etched in stone since the beginning. It is their most sacred name and title, to be born a Sangheili.

So when the Sharquoi declared himself a Hesduroi not only were his words treacherous. They were pure heresy. In the battles to come there would be no prisoners or occupations of Hesduroi worlds there would be only death for breaking the most sacred of laws. The dismissal of Sanghelios's claim to sow the forefather's bone is to sow damnation everlasting " and by the will of the gods and their ancestors Thel and his brothers and sisters of battle would be their instruments of retribution for this unsightly betrayal.

The trio continued to watch in silence after the Arbiter's proclamation. The Sharquoi were powerful and unyielding in their task. One of the daunting creatures even managed to wound Sierra-042 when he shielded Mercury 0-2 from counter stomp that would have crushed the kneeling SPARTAN VI after she attempted to sweep kick the behemoth off its feet. In the end the deadly quintet fell at the hands of the demons that capitalized on their inherent lack of speed. Only scraps and spare parts remained in the end before the SPARTANS made their way to a waiting Echo 351 at the evac zone. Buret carried Douglas's limping form to the Osprey for the Fire and never left his side even after they boarded.

The Mandalorian Marines were already ground side the moment the SPARTAN Team reached evac sight while the Mandalore's fleet had secured Requiem's only corporeal exit before engaging the derelict-automated Hesduroi fleet. The Mantle's Approach and a portion of the Hesduroi had regrettably escaped in the confusion through the installation's superluminal transportation grid to another undocumented installation known only as Rebreathe in Requiem's archive. Innovator ordered his fleet through the portal to give chase but the Didact had the gateway destroyed the moment Forerunner's ragtag fleet exited the event horizon.

"With no way to track the UR-Didact at the moment we have no way of countering his advances," 009 sighed in unwilling defeat. "There is a lunatic prancing around somewhere in our backyard and I can't find him."

"Should we considered alerting the Sith Empire and the Galactic Alliance to this threat?" asked Rtuous.

"That would mean alerting Krayt that there are Forerunner installations safely hidden a way in his sector."

"We don't have to tell the thrice damned Sith anything about the holly relics," Thel spat from his seat. "Just warn him about the

threat the Neo-Ecumene poses."

"What of the composer the Librarian mentioned?" Rtuous questioned.

"Destroyed," an emerald voice answered from across the pub.

"How do you know that little ancilla?" Questioned the Chieftain as Senti approached their table.

"In 2562 the four years after the conclusion of the Great War three Infinity-class dreadnoughts were tasked with the destruction of the Halo Array. The UNSC Infinity INF-101, the UNSC Wakeful INF-103, and the UNSC Reverent INF-104 were tasked with the destruction of the Halos."

"So the composer was kept on one of the Rings," Thel inferred.

"Correct. Captain Thomas J. Lasky of the Reverent was tasked with the destruction of the Gamma Halo. He made mention of a Flood outbreak in his report following the recovery of 049 Abject Testament the monitor of Installation 03."

"Knowing Lasky he didn't take any chances and destroyed the installation the moment Species H617 was discovered," Charles spoke mirthfully. He always liked Lasky "the man was a clever blend of idealism and realism that made him a hell of a Captain. "How did Monitor 049 react?"

"Enthusiastically actually," answered his Vod'ika. "His core programing made it impossible for him sterilize the samples on the installation."

"So he didn't go rampant like 343?" Senti shook her head at the SPARTAN'S question. Charles closed his eyes in thought for a moment before continuing. "All right we'll warn the Sith and the Alliance."

"We should also make a public announcement regarding the Neo-Ecumene before raising our defense readiness to a condition of 2 my Brothers," Rtuous spoke soberly.

"Agreed/Yeah," the other two answered simultaneously. Deliberations concerning military spending, public and bedroom politics, and the accursed paperwork (their most hated foe) soon followed after that as they managed 23 quintillion lives from the confines of a extranet chat room. The minutes progressed into hours as Charles debated with his like-minded and yet vastly different comrades about the necessary changes needed to be facilitated while maintaining orders that ensured Commonwealth stability. A stiff drink was on the horizon of everyone's mind as they read the intercepted Galactic Alliance comm-traffic concerning a possible raid on an Imperial shipping yard in Calamari space and even worse the evidence clearly indicating it was an Sith trap.

"We should increase our presence in the Nilgaard sector," Charles said. He looked up from the file with a sober expression.

"Incase Admiral Stazi fails?" Rtuous questioned.

"No Brother, incase he succeeds," Thel spoke grimly.

"You herd Krayt's policies towards insurrection," 009 brought up the vid speech concerning the aiding of the alliance remnant five years ago. Darth Krayt was anything but subtle.

/"I have known insurrection! It breeds disorder and chaos, and I will not tolerate it!"/

"By the Ethos, the Mon Calamariâ€|," Bracktanus contemplated. "They will beâ€|."

"Wiped out. Gar Stazi is brazenly ignoring the fact that his actions will justify Krayt's revenge against the Mon Calamari."

"And we can't warn the GFFA without compromising the security of our people in their camp doing so would also risk those among the Sithâ€|. Blast!" Thel slammed his fist against the table destroying its coding. Senti sighed as she rewrote code with a few subconscious subroutines. She noted the tired expressions adorning all three of the warlords. "I curse politicsâ€|."

"Seconded," 009 said with mirth.

"Motion carried," finished Rtuous causing a few chuckles from the tired soldiers. "Who should we send though? Most of Doisac's fleets are actively maintaining guard along the boarders of commonwealth space while Sanghelios patrols the outer rim."

"Not to mention our expeditionary fleets are occupied in both the W-40K and S-02C galaxies." Thel continued, "Purging the Tyranid will undoubtedly put a strain on our resources as well."

"We're stretched too thin. Especially with Unrequited-steward slinking about. MIN's preoccupied with culling foreign and domestic problems. 151 is already pulling more than its fare share in the Traverse. Not to mention U-SOB (Unggoy Special Operations Bureau) and FIG-7 (Jiralhanae Final Inquiry Group 7) are overtasked with containing Sith and Council infiltrators," 009 scowled in contemplation. "I hate to drop this on Raan the moment we instate her but perhaps we should make greater use of the Quarian's fleets."

"Why not? They have the second largest fleet of the Commonwealth and they have consolidated more than enough military might to make the Sith think thrice," the Arbiter added.

"Agreed. This could very well be the opportunity the Quarians need to prove they truly are a power of greater standing to the extragalactic community," carried the Jiralhanae before noting Senti approaching their table again. "What is it little ancilla?"

"A priority one hail from Fleet-Master Muil'Rdan has arrived. Shall I patch him through?" Trio's shoulders stiffened. Priority one hails were never a good sign especially when it was a Sangheili Fleet-Master asking for help. Sighing in frustration they gave Senti a tired nod before restoring their masks of unflinching supremacy and wisdom.

The daunting image of a sangheili silhouette a few inches shorter than Thel manifested in a swarm of luminescent code before the trio's table. Then Rdan's form stabilized into a recognizable shape 009 had not seen since the opening of the Sith-Imperial War. "My sincerest apologies War Council but an incident has occurred."

"What's the situation Fleet-Master?" 009 spoke for the others.

"Pandemonium milord. A malignant maelstrom of pandemonium." Muil sighed as he graced the underside of his mandibles with a much needed scratch before continuing. "Two cycles ago my task force stumbled across a Tyranid Hive Fleet. Acting on my standing orders from our Virtuous Arbiter I order my battle siblings to burn their mongrel hides. They fled and we gave chase."

"Were the hives destroyed?" Questioned Bracktanus neutrally.

"Yes Holy Marabout. But the vermin did not go quietly. They launched genetic carrier spores at several garden worlds during our chase. Four of which were inhabited by nothing more than basic sentient life so they were purged without questionâ€|."

"But the fifth wasn't," Charles inferred.

"No Noble Death," the Ship-master unconsciously groveled under the SPARTAN'S methodical gaze.

"You were able keep them contained?" It was a rhetorical question Charles expecting nothing less from the Fleet-Master. Such a failure would be unacceptable for any Ascetic.

"I ordered a precision glassing of the north-west region of the main continent after relocating the Eldar commander and her allies to safely well outside of the fallout area."

"Eldar?" 009 continued to drill.

"Yesâ€|. They are one of two factions that have achieved a technological tier of 2. The others four civilisations doing battle over this garden world are tier 3 currently. I have entered into and uneasy alliance with the Eldar in order to contain the Necrons that had been slumbering beneath the soil of this poisonous world."

"HAD Fleet-Master?"

"Like I mentioned earlier Lord Innovator. The has situation deteriorated. The emergence of the Forces of Chaos has made the other factions act foolishly in their desperation. This chaos is unlike any foe we have encountered before."

"Hmmâ€|. So your fighting on multiple fronts thus the alliance with the Eldar. Give us a full sitrep Fleet-Master," 009 maintained control of the debriefing as the other two warlords decided to sit back and let Charles do what he did best and analyze the situation. Out of the three members of the war council Innovator's analytical skills were at their sharpest. Decades of war and espionage had made him the preverbal think-tank of the Commonwealth. While Bracktanus acted as its lenient conscious and Vadum its unstoppable wrath.

So the Mandalore just sat there listening while putting the pieces together as Rdan stewed under the II's scrutiny. The situation on Kronus was leading to be more dire than the Fleet-Master had first insinuated. This Blood Ravens Chapter was proving to be a most cumbersome and yet strangely competent irritant. As they unknowingly impeded the Sangheili's efforts at containing of the real threats. Those threats being the Necron and Chaos. The mechanized legions were on the move now thanks in no small part to a fools among the Tau who apparently sought ancient relics of great power and accidentally unleashed the Necron instead. These unwittingly Ethereals were beginning remind Charles of the San'Shyuum when Rdan described the Tau and their "Greater Good." It sounded like a load of hogwash to him but 009 kept his thoughts to himself.

The tales about Chaos was nothing but disconcerting. This Word Bearers legion was primitive but was proving to be just as fanatical as the Blood Ravens. Not to mention the other forces of chaos that seemed to be pouring into Kronus through thisâ€|Warp-space. Muil'Rdan's fleet was easily keeping them in check but even the Sangheili's legendary battle prowess had limits and with in a week they could be overrun without reinforcements. Especially an exploration fleet consisting of half a dozen corvettes, four frigates, three destroyers, two cruiser, and one supercarrier. A powerful and mobile assortment on its own but never meant for a prolonged campaigns.

A remorseful sigh drew 009 from his reflections as the Fleet-Master brought his report to a close, "My fleet is holding but if they continue to flood from this warp like puss from an infected wound the Chaos will eventually overrun us."

"I will go," Charles opened his eyes in conclusion.

"But what of Saren? Perhaps Iâ€" Bracktanus began.

"No. You're on the other side of the known universe. With the Seventh-Fleet I can aid Fleet-Master Rdan in less than three days. It would take you three times that to divert from your exploration of S-02C. Rdan needs his reinforcements now and I'm not going to deny him that when our vode (siblings) are dyingâ€" Innovator paused before speaking again to quell whatever opinion Thel was forming, "Thel you must return to the Lacedaemon Cluster to maintain order back home. Sanghelios has not been graced by its Arbiter in over three months. The Kaidon Collective is going to start doubting your righteousness if you continue conducting domestic policy from a galaxy far, far awayâ€".

"I get itâ€¦," Thel muttered in defeat while simultaneously grumbling about the cruelty of fate.

"Can't keep dodging those marriage proposals forever ner vod (my brother)," Innovator teased as Rtuous cackled. The Marabout was thankful that Jiralhanae were polygamous thus negating the need for committed relationships. Despite the old age creeping up on him life was apparently still pretty good for the weathered Chieftain " aka the Alpha if you ever ask the maidens of Doisac. "As for Saren I have a solution for that as well."

[illegible]

"Leave of absence?" Shepard diverted her gaze from the CIC. She was about to put course heading in for Noveria and was intent on taking out whatever biological weapons Saren's boffins were cooking up at Peak 15.

"An incident that requires my full attention has arisen. I'm sorry Commander but at the moment I can't say more. Mainly because in a way this situation is quite alien to the Commonwealth as well. Thus the need for my presence immediately."

The N7 raised a brow at that. She didn't like secrets on her ship. She knew from experience that secrets often got people killed, "So your leaving?"

"For now I will return when the situation has stabilized. For the time being I will have a MINSAD-6 team reallocated to the Normandy to act in my stead."

"Something tells me you're not asking Mandalore," Elizabeth crossed her arms giving the SPARTAN her patented death stare that was known to break lesser men. 009 puffed an exasperated sigh as he handed her the holopad. "Ceres-Zero? Awful lot of black ink on these files."

"About twenty years worth," he added with a hit of pride that didn't go unnoticed to Shepard despite the SPARTAN'S neutral presence.

"I fail to see what can be more important than Reapers?"

"Commander, the Reaper threat is minuscule compared to the devils that lie in wait well beyond the rim of your galaxy." Tali and Alenko watched on in interest as the SPARTAN adopted his stern but solicitous tone. "I will aid you as best as I can. BUT my duty is to the Commonwealth first and foremost."

"But..."

"They are SPARTANS Commander. Ceres-Zero is MORE than qualified for an operation like this," Charles interrupted.

"I don't like spooks."

"We prefer intelligencers," the ex ONISAD crossed his arms.

"We?"

"I was the proverbial Bogieman of my time when I served in the UNSC's Military Intelligence Division."

"Was?" Tali teased.

"Okay still am. But we're digressing here. Ceres-Zero should intercept the Normandy in twenty miles aboard a retrofitted X-70B Phantom-Class Transport registered under the name The Ambling Barfly."

"I haven't much choice in the matter do I?" She sighed. Nothing was

"Your progression is remarkable Spartan," the patriarchs daughter spoke. She was an entity immersed in the lighter aspects of the force and the wisdom it provided. If not for her occasional blushing and

self proclaimed immortal. "C-Coldâ€|."

"I know pain," the infernal pits of Mortis froze over as the Spartan crossed the streams of lava without fear or emotion. Whatever warmth that once existed faded from his presence. "I've danced with its horrors, witnessed its capacity of barbarism, dealt with its devils, responded with prejudice against its victims, and still I persist in trying Death's patience. I am a SPARTAN-II Commando and my duty as a Soldier is to safeguard existence no matter the cost."

"H-How ca-an y-youâ€|?" he struggled to form coherent thought under Charles's gaze.

"Endure? I live for more than just myself Bogan Last Son of Mortis. I lay awake at night so others can sleep soundly. There is no glory. Only dutyâ€"and I. Shall. Fulfill-it."

"You'll dieâ€¦|." Bogan said with disgust despite the alien terror coursing through his veins.

"Die? You don't know? Spartans never die," Innovator said with a sadistic grin. "We're just Missing In Action."

[illegible]

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{0.5 Millennia later, Celestial Monolith World Mortis}
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"You've progressed faster than I foresaw. Impressive," the Father maintained his stoic regal façade as the Spartan-II towered over him.

"Thanks," Charles spoke with indifference.

"You don't seem pleased?"

"For three thousand and five hundred and thirty-three years I've trained and still I do not know the name of this enemy you claim I must face."

"It is not one but many beings of malignant intent."

Charles blinked behind the anonymity of his run down MJOLNIR before issuing an exasperated sigh, "Lovely."

"Yes. Well, it is a good thing you attract individuals of similar virtues."

"Virtues?"

"Individuals who have stared off into the void but did not blink.
Such as yourself."

"Hesitation gets people killed and your Son's attempts to break me were juvenile," Charles crossed his arms.

"On that we agree Spartan," the Father chuckled. "Shall we begin your final lesson?"

"The sooner the better."

"Very well let us not delay your comrades any further," Mortis shook with eager trepidations as the two combatants flexed their will over the force. A Challenge had been made, "Make me yield and your path will be cleared."

[illegible]

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{January 23, 137 ABY: UPM Spirit of Fire, Mandalore the Innovator,
Indomitable-Class Dreadnought, Location: Mandalorian Seventh-Fleet
inbound for Kronus}
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"Soâ€¦ Ori 'vod?"

"Yes, Vod'ika?"

"What's it like?" Senti asked while everyone nodded in agreement towards the elephant in the room. A now Admiral James Cutter, Professor Ellen Anders, and Red-Team sat on one side of the conference room while Teams Mercury and Vesta occupied the other side with the holographic projections of Thel'Vadum and Rtuous Bracktanus.

"I spent almost six millennia training Senti. To be honest I'm not sure how to describe it myself. But the word LONG does come to mind," Charles said tiredly his top of the line MJOLNIR GEN5 Mark XIII was faded and weathered. Chips and scars decorated its once pristine shell of the sub-atomically hardened beskar while the Micro Corusca Arc Reactors flicker on its last leg. Let's not even mention the unaccounted for helmet.

"No. What I mean is what's it like being in tuned with the force now?" For her the wait outside the Monolith as a few agonizing seconds. But for an AI time they were practically decades.

"Yes, I'm quite curious as well? And how does it work?" Admiral Cutter the Spirit of Fire's new XO spoke.

"Space magic?" Alice whispered rhetorically. It all sounded ridiculous to her and Red-Team, but they kept those thoughts to themselves.

"Wellâ€¦."

"Well what?!" the AI was clearly excited her hard-light construct was practically giddy now as she rocked back and forth on her heels.

"It's like seeing the world without blinders for the first time or better yet in colour instead of black and white."

"Fascinating," Anders had captivate glow in her eye for the helmetless Spartan before frowning a little. "This is an odd question but have we met before?"

"I don't believe so," 009 shifted back in seat.

"You look strangely familiar," she said with a raised eye brow when Charles nonchalantly force summoned the pitcher of water from the other end of the table to refill his glass.

"Phfftâ€¦. Show off," Senti muttered causing in a few others to chuckle and nod in agreement.

Charles just gave the AI a withering glare that made her avatar shrink, "Dr. Halsey was my Aunt perhaps you see a resemblance there?"

Red team shook their heads. "Why did I see it sooner?" Jerome chuckled while Douglas quietly handed Alice an IOU.

"Halsey was yourâ€¦and you're a-â€¦," Professor Anders began to stutter at the implication.

"Spartan?" Charles said dismissively in a manner that was reminiscent of his Godmother. Ellen felt a tick mark form as the Mandalore seemed to talk down to her with those damn golden glowing demoniâ€¦. Oh who was she kidding Halsey's nephew was hot! It was taking all of her restraint not to flirting with him like she was in Uni again. "Yes, well Auntie Cat alway did make a habit of giving me what I wanted. But we are digressing."

In a few days they would be in orbit of Kronus with the entire Seventh-Fleet or as it was apprehensively called by non mandos, "The Innovator's Fist." Charles mused it was because he used the Seventh in a manner similar to how Darth Vader used Five Hundred and First Legion during the founding years of the Empire.

It was a task group meant for one purpose "to crush any opposition to the Mandalore's will. The Spirit of Fire although the flagship of the Seventh-Fleet was just one of seven Indomitable-Class Dreadnoughts. Each with their own individual task group of twelve Gargon-Class Light Frigates. This of course was not including the Forty-eight Nog-Class corvettes, twenty-four Orion-Class Heavy Frigates, sixteen Goliath-Class Destroyers, fourteen Achilles-Class Cruiser, four FÅ«ma-Class Stealth Frigates, and three Solomon-Class Carriers. Bringing the Seventh-Fleet to a grand total of 200 ships just over a kilometer long. Not the biggest fleet in Commonwealth space but certainly not one to dismiss lightly. Especial when only the cream of the crop were given station in the Seventh.

[illegible]

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{January 25, 137 ABY_UPM Spirit of Fire, Mandalore the Innovator,  
Indomitable-Class Dreadnought, Mandalorian Seventh-Fleet_Location:  
Kronus, Kronus System of the Lithesh Sector, Galaxy W-40K}
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Charles's eyes narrowed in distaste at the sight of Kronus he felt something that was only comparable to the malevolent nexus that is Korriban. From first glance the planet seemed innocent enough. Temperate with varying ecosystems mostly on one supercontinent that took up twenty percent of the planets surface. While the other eighty percent was made up of vast oceans and flyspeck islands and archipelagos. But what was not visible to some was now blatantly obvious to the force-sensitive 009.

"So much corruptionâ€¦," Charles muttered. He could practically smell its decay permeating from the garden world below. Giving the nod to Sentinel the flagship of the Seventh-Fleet began to hail every conceivable frequency. Half a moment latter the inhabitants of the Lithesh Sector were now tuned in, "This is Mandalore the Innovator the premier of the United Provinces of Mandalore and CO of her Seventh-Fleet. To the leaders of the Imperium of Man, the Tau Empire, and Da Waaagh Gorgutz please cease all aggression and allow us to aid our Sangheili vode (siblins) and their Eldar ally in cleansing this planet of all Necron, Chaos, and Tyranid elements. Once the Emergency Priority Order 100972A-1 has been maintained you may do with this world as you pleaseâ€¦. The Commonwealth has no interest Kronus. I repeat we are only here to eliminate the hazardous life-forms nothing more."

"Noble Death your punctual homage is truly without limits," a hard-light projection of the exploration fleet's commander Fleet-Master Muil'Rdan's appeared next to the SPARTAN. Without reservation Rdan brought his fist to his heart to feel his honour flow through him. "We are proud to fight beside Mandalorians once again."

"What heresy is this?" the image of a man in his mid-thirties appeared before them in the battledress of an Imperial Guard General. "Consorting with Xeno scum! Daring to order aside the Liberators of Kronus! Disregarding the will of the Emperor! Hear this Heretic!"

'A fanaticâ€¦greatâ€¦,' Charles thought to himself while the charismatic imperial continued his sermon.

"Iâ€¦!" he bought his power claw to his chest before aiming his wrist-mounted bolter at the Spartan and bellowing proudly. "General Lukas Alexander, Governor-Militant of Kronus will not stand aside as you ravage our world! You and your filthy bedfellows will burn in our cleaning fires! For the Emperor!"

"General you should be made aware that if you do not cease and desist all non-instigated aggression against Commonwealth assets and Allies we will be forced to designate the Imperium of Man as an aggressor and will exercise a policy of extreme prejudice in future encounters."

"Do your worst traitor!" Alexander spat at the camera comically muddling his image. Cutter just sighed at the man's stupidity as he stood beside the II in his new UPM navy whites.

009 didn't really care. Either way the newly sentenced races of the Hood Protocol were to be eliminated â€" with or without the other civilisations cooperation, "Very well. Does the Governor-Militant speak for all factions in this system?"

"No, he does not." The thick baritone of weathered veteran spoke as the daunting visage of a Crimson Space Marine joined the conference of leaders. "I am Brother-Captain Davian Thule. Force Commander of the Blood Ravens Chapter of this world. But I must concur with Governor Alexander on this matter. Your words although masked in nobility are tainted by your association with the xenos. I too will not comply."

"Captain. Regardless of your opinion of me and my compatriots surely you would not waste the lives of your brothers needlessly?" Charles reached out through the force and frowned when he sensed another strong mind immune to his more subtle manipulations. Undaunted by the failed venture 009 fell back to political charisma, "This could be an opportunity for mutual cooperation and perhaps even one day camaraderie between our two peoples. The Imperium of Man does not need to stand alone in this Universe there are comrades waiting around the corner eager to welcome you with open arms if you let them."

There was foreboding pause throughout Kronus as listeners huddled around Voxs, Radios, and other forms of communication with apprehension. Then they all heard it a resigned sigh. A heavy one at that, "I am sorry Mandalore you honour me with this request. But the Lex Imperialisâ€|our Emperor's will and word is clear."

"Understood." Charles gave a respectful nod to the Adeptus Astarte. At least the man listened, "Perhaps one day we will shake hands as brothersâ€|. Until that time I will see you on the front."

"Well said." Thule smirked, "I look forward to when our blades cross on the glorious fields of battle."

009 gave a reticent nod as he turn to the newest member of their conversation, "A most respectable and promising individual. Truly you must guided by the Greater Good."

"If you mean a Greater Good for my people then yes," Charles turned before looking down to the five foot four tau with curiosity. Next to the Ethereal stood a taller figure by four inches he was stoic and calm like the Brother-Captain. "Who might you two be?"

"Choosing diplomacy first? Very wise," the Tau in ceremonial robes smile before giving bow. "I am Aun'El Shi'Ores a humble servant of the Greater Good and this is Shas'O Kais of the Fire-Caste and Commander of the Tau forces."

"It is pleasure to meet you both," Charles smirked internally Shi'Ores's mind was wide open to force manipulation compared to his commander's. "I can only express my deepest regret that our peoples could not have met under more favourable circumstances."

"On that that we agree Mandalore," he seems none the wiser. "And I would like to accept your offer of assistance."

"Holly one is that wise?" Kais cut in while studying his jubilant master and then enigmatic Spartan. "We know even less of his people than were do the Sangheili."

"Your Commander speaks the truth Aun'El Shi'Ores," Charles crossed his arms behind his back while reaching through the force again to sway the Ethereal. Innovator then turned to the grainy fizzling image of what could only be a ten foot tall Warlord coming into existence next to the tau. "And what can I be do'n for yah?"

The mechanized ork just stared at the SPARTAN with a look that could be best described as quizzical before laughing-roaring throatily, "I'm Warzlord Gorgutz da 'Ead 'Unter and Whize yuz be talkt'n like

meh boyz?"

"I've been told ya-lot talk like meh Mum a bit. So I'm give'n the old tongue a whirl," both Tau and a still patiently listening Blood Raven stared on in disbelief. "Oiâ€|So Gorgutz yah be interested in make'n nice or not?"

The Warlord just laughed again, "I like yuz humie. Cuz yu da furst pink-skin ta not be look'n down on meh boyz."

Charles frown behind his visor again. The Ork's mind was remarkably resilient to the force. It was almost like Gorgutz was genetic engined to be resilient to it. Like a Forerunner Geas. Were all orks like this? If so the potential for the species could be boundless, "So you'd help meh kick dem clankas and 'ose havoc twitzs out?"

"Meh and mah boyz don't like demz craz-guyz and melta-fellaz anywayz," Gorgutz gave a toothy metal grin that could have been endearing if the damn Warlord wasn't so damn foreboding. Charles just gave a nod and the Greenskin began to faded away with an awfully happy grin on his face that could have been nostalgic, "Seez ya 'atter 'Eclaimzerz."

"Did he justâ€|," Cutter blinked in disbelief. Everyone else who was familiar with the term stiffened. "Call us Reclaimers?"

"Where could he have learn that term?" 009 questioned as his mind debated the possibilities, "Rdan's?"

"I-I do not know Noble Death. Perhaps the Forerunners' reach was greater than we initially knew."

"Perhapsâ€|," Charles then turned to the Brother-Captain who seemed to be engrossed in thought. "Captain Thule though we are enemies I must request an inquiry."

"An inquiry?" the Blood Raven wasn't sure how to respond. He was still in disbelief on how the Spartan managed an alliance with Gorgutz. 'This Man is dangerous,' he thought to himself before giving a polite nod.

"Have the Orks ever referred to you or your people as Reclaimers?"

"Never," Thule said honestly as he and the others observed the Mandalorian take a more contemplative stance and then nodded his thanks. The Brother-Captain's image faded from the deck after that leaving only the Sangheili and the Tau.

"Am I to infer the title Reclaimer has some specific meaning?" Shi'Ores broke the silence. Charles just nodded his answer making the Ethereal pause before continuing, "Perhaps after we save this world from the dangers you spoke of you can elaborate its significance. For now there is a task to be done and we the Tau humbly welcome you generosity."

"On the front then," the Spartan gave a respect full nod to the fading duo before turning to the graceful arrival of a delicate figure decorated in green and white with red foci psyker crystals adorning her helm and armour, as well as two metal protrusions at her

back that reminded Charles of the sashimonos ancient samurai would wear into battle.

"Ah you must be Farseer TÃoldeer it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance milady," 009 nodded politely to their final guest and potential long-term ally before feeling a disturbance in the force from the beautiful woman. She was distraught despite her professional faÃ§ade, "I'm sorry, have I done something to offend?"

The eldar presence in the force felt surprised and yet intrigued by the II's intuitiveness though she refrained from showing it.

"My apologies Mandalore." she spoke with understandable caution. "But you are mistaken. I am not TÃoldeer. I am Farseer RÃldwen Macha of the Craftworld Biel-tan."

Innovator looked towards Rdan for confirmation before turning back towards Macha, "I was informed that Farseer TÃoldeer of UlthwÃ© was in command of Eldar presence here."

"She isâ€|or was," Charles was sure the Farseer was frowning behind the anonymity of her professional faÃ§ade.

"What happened?" 009 questioned the distress woman but she seemed unwilling to answer.

"She went MIA after a falling into an artfully laid out pincer by General Alexander. As of this moment the she and the remaining complement Black Guardians guarding her are evading capture as we speak Noble Death."

"Am I to assume that any these webway devices you mentioned in your last report are either out of range or destroyed Fleet-master?"

"Yes milord," the Innovator was now studying a holo of the last known location of the Eldar commander and her platoon. "Our previous attempts at extraction have proven fruitless."

"That's a lot of AA Alexander has set up to counter the air supremacy you've established. At any other time I'd compliment you Fleet-master for forcing him into a corner," Charles continued to analyze the data available to him. "But because of it he's consolidated his resources and dug in at Victory Bay. Conventional exfil is a no go and their numbers are dwindling as we speak. Look's like we have to get a little messy."

"Sir?" Charles's newly designated XO turned to the Spartan curiously.

"Cutter I want orbital supremacy over Victory bay," 009 never looked up from his musing

"Sir!" Cutter would have been lying didn't say he was eager to jump back into the saddle. Anything was better than remembering the family he had unwittingly left behind.

"Jorbe contact General Bralor and tell him I want him and his Marines ground side hammering Alexanders perimeter with armoured escort, ADS (Armour Defense Systems) use is authorised," the Mandalore spoke and the bridge's crew immediately went to work relaying his orders. "Tell

Colonel Vasur to get his Akalenedat Ramikad Traat'aliite (Hard Contact Commando Teams) prepped and ready for frontline orbital insertion along with SPARTAN Vorpan Traat'aliite (Green Teams) Sigma-Seven through Fourteen. Senti I want Kebiin Traat'aliite (Blue Teams) Bravo-Six and Nine, Lima-Seven, and Yankee-One and Three deployed behind enemy lines and doing what they do best. Sabotage and subterfuge. I want them to knocking out those AA emplacements and crippling supply routs. Get both MINSAD-6 teams set and ready an infiltration operation. Their primary objective is the capture the Governor-Militant, secondary is the elimination of his support staff."

"You heard the Mandalore let's get it done people," Cutter ordered as he began to coordinate with the Seventh's COs and AIs.

"Cutter you have the Seventh-Fleet," 009 was almost half way off the bridge with the holos of 'Rdan and Macha floating by his side when the weathered former UNSC Captain solemnly acknowledged the command.

"What of me milord?" the Sangheili was first to speak as 009 reached a teleporter and began typing in his destination.

"Coordinate with Admiral Cutter and continue all operations against the Necrons."

"By your will," the Acetic brought his fist to his heart with a bow before his image winked out. Leaving the Spartan and the Eldar alone as they appeared in the main armoury where a titanic trio in brand spanking new olive green MJOLNIR GEN5 Mark XIIIs were standing on the line and at ready.

"Red-Team, Commander on deck!" Jerome bellowed proudly as his team saluted their new CO. 092 had donned the Ranger variant, Alice to his right wore the latest GUNGNIR, while 042 Red-Team's big man standing at 7'7" was sporting the Protector. Their colour scheme hadn't changed much since Requiem only difference was Jerome's Golden visor.

"At ease, Spartans." Charles said after returning the salute. While Macha's image floated there in stunned silence at the sight of the intimidating commandos. The runes were telling her these soldiers were not to be trifled with. Their movement was precise but gracefully and devoid of wasted energy. 'Their builds almost resembled that of Eldar. Except slightly taller and more muscular,' RÃ¶dwen thought privately to herself as she felt the one with 092 inscribed on his chest plate scrutinizing her, 'why do I feel the need to be dressed more tastefully all of a sudden?'

"Follow me we have a HVT to rescue," said the Mandalore in his new steel coloured MJOLNIR/Locus with olive green trimming shaking RÃ¶dwen from her musing. "Farseer Macha."

"Yes?" she said while looking up to the daunting Spartan who was a full head taller than her. They were in different room now devoid of gravity. The IIs were floating towards what looked like open torpedo tubes. Much to her shock the Mandalorians were inverting and fastening themselves to some sort of launcher.

"We'll be deploying soon milady. So please forward us any and all

relevant data concerning Farseer TÃ¸ldeer you can so we can properly coordinate." Macha was about to object but stopped when she felt the weight of II's hand on her shoulder through the force. "Udesiir Macha ret'urcye mhi (Relax Macha maybe we'll meet again). Ori'haat (I swear â€" no bull)."

"T-Thank you," she said before her image winked out as well. For a second 009 felt it. Macha's hope had overshadowing her rational for a moment before logic set in again. The Spartan-II smiled as he left the tube like an under powered MAC slug. In the darkness that was war there always seemed to be glimmers of hope.

End
file.